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ACOUSTIC GUITAR

JULY/AUGUST 2019 | ACOUSTICGUITAR.C

7 SONGS TO PLAY

RICHARD THOMPSON
SHE TWISTS THE KNIFE AGAIN

MIMI FOX
AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL

ROBERT JOHNSON/ELMORE JAMES
I BELIEVE I'LL DUST MY BROOM

DOC WATSON
BLACK MOUNTAIN RAG

. . . AND MORE

RICHARD THOMPSON

PLAY THE FRESH LICKS OF AN OLD FOLKIE

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MAGSLIDE

+

ALEX DE GRASSI
ANDREW YORK
TONY KLASSEN



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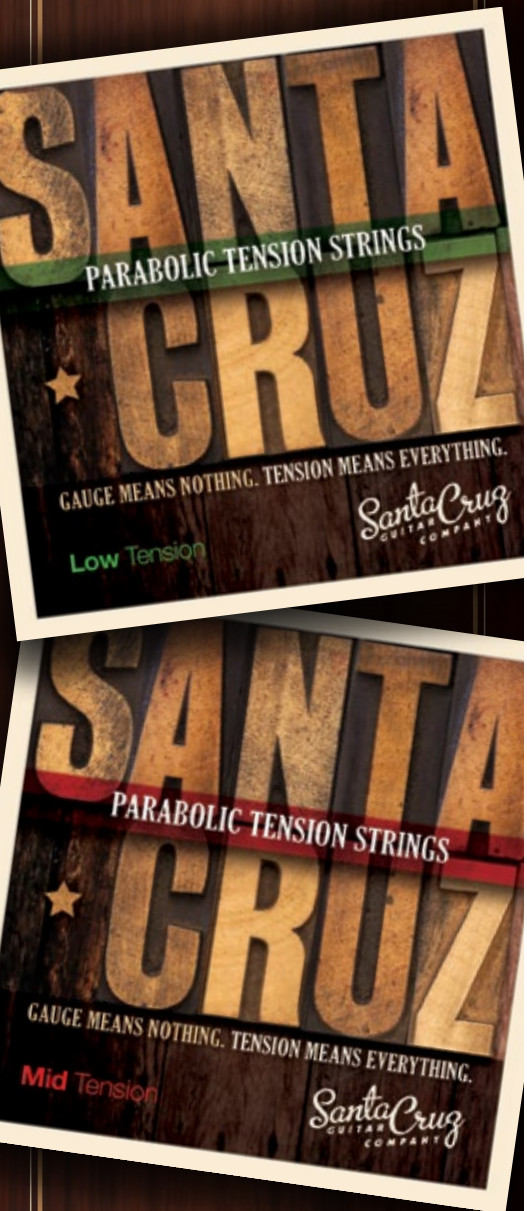


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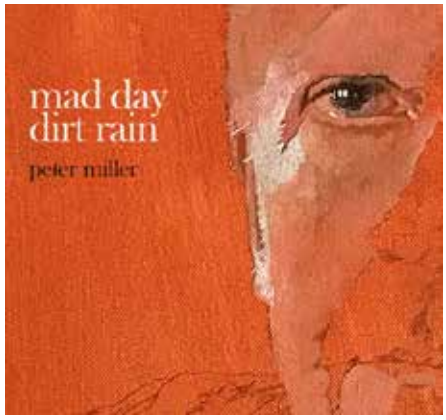
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THE FRONT PORCH

Peter Miller #1



Peter Miller #2



COURTESY OF PETER MILLER

When I'm traveling and the subject of music comes up, people I meet often say: "Oh, it must be great living near San Francisco. There are so many great musicians there." By which they tend to mean people like Carlos Santana, Dave Schools, Bonnie Raitt, Mickey Hart, Steve Smith, Joan Baez, and other A-list performers and recording artists. I usually reply: "Yes, that's true. And I bet there are great musicians here, too, since there seem to be great musicians everywhere." By which I mean the B- to Z-list players who are every bit as mindful, every bit as dedicated, and every bit as musical—though their celebrity may extend no further than their city or town, or even one local coffeehouse, church, or community center.

Why? Legendary music educator Shinichi Suzuki puts it best: "Musical ability is not an inborn talent but an ability which can be developed. Any child who is properly trained can develop musical ability, just as all children develop the ability to speak their mother tongue. The potential of every child is unlimited."

A recent careless error of mine brought this topic home to me forcefully. So much so that I would like to formulate a new general principle that describes it. First, the story of my error:

A few weeks ago, I received a sample of a new album called *Mad Day Dirt Rain* by Australian songwriter and fingerstylist Peter Miller. His was a new name to me, and I listened with increasing engagement on my homeward drive that evening, impressed with the narrative songwriting, the understated vocals, and a fingerpicking accompaniment style punctuated by deft, emotional slide work.

Miller didn't include a business card or contact info with his sample CD, so I went online and found Peter-Miller.com and listened to a few more tracks of beautifully realized fingerstyle guitar. There was no mention of the new album, and none of the samples included slide, but I blithely assumed that (a) the new album had not yet been officially released; and (b) he had only recently incorporated slide into his playing.

I emailed him the next day: "Thank you for sending me your new CD. I love it and I'm really intrigued by the way you are integrating slide into your playing. Is there any chance you could send a digital file to our Music Editor? He hasn't received the CD yet and I want him to hear it now."

His reply read, in part: "Which CD did you get? My last album was a few years ago. I actually haven't used slide. It may be another Peter Miller. I know there are a few of us." I gulped, took another look at the CD packaging, and found the web address of the label. Different Peter Miller, indeed.

I asked the second Peter Miller how many other guitar-playing Peter Millers he knew or knew of. "There is another in Melbourne, a Peter Miller-Robinson in Sydney, and a Peter Miller who does electronica and film scores."

Then I did my own bit of web searching and discovered British-born guitarist Peter Miller, a.k.a. Big Boy Pete, whose band the Jaywalkers were the second act on the Beatles' fall 1963 English tour, and who's been living in San Francisco, of all places, since 1972. (Have a look at BigBoyPete.com for the full story.) Now, everyone has heard of the Peter Principle, right? Coined by Canadian educator Laurence J. Peter, it states: "In a hierarchy, every employee tends to rise to his level of incompetence." Without debating the merits of that statement, I'd like to propose the Peter Miller Principle (coined by me), which states: "In every town and city, large, small, or otherwise, there are great musicians, so go out and listen to them and tell your friends to do the same."

To hear Peter Millers, visit peter-miller.com and buccaneerarchipelago.com.au.

Enjoy this new issue of *Acoustic Guitar* and let me know your thoughts, suggestions, and opinions.

—David A. Lusterman
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AXE OF LOVE

I enjoyed the interesting commonsense thoughts from Iris Guitars' luthier Adam Buchwald on the qualities of affordable vs. custom and glued-in vs. bolt-on guitars (*AG* February 2019). I used to laugh at the very thought of a bolt-on archtop, but recently bought for $500 an Italian-made 1965 Goya 103R, a bolt-on thinline laminated cutaway, beautifully made and clearly a copy of a 1965-ish Guild Slim Jim. Despite a repaired top crack and a thin 1-7/8-inch body, its acoustic tone is enticing and the sustain is surprising. It's shortly going in for a complete jazz-friendly makeover with a new nut and refret; a Shadow Vintage Swinger pickup; new pots, wiring, and knobs; Van Ghent NOS tuners; and a Gretsch G tailpiece to cover an unwanted whammy-bar perforation in the top. The classic shape, dimensions, and feel of this little charmer have definitely sent me to guitar heaven. Your repair guru Mamie Minch will no doubt cringe at the difference between my refurb costs and any objective market value of the guitar, but sometimes, as indeed she acknowledges, love will find a way!

—*Martin Westmacott*, Northampton, UK

The 1965 Goya



MORE TIME TO ENJOY

I just received my online version of the May/June *Acoustic Guitar* and I am grateful for the articles on Western swing, Joan Baez, Capos, and more. I am loving this new issue. As a retired printer and lifelong consumer of printed books, magazines, and newspapers, I am saddened by the closing of bookstores, newspapers going out of business, and magazines shuttering. Some of my favorite music magazines are gone. And I am not entirely in favor of the world of reading going digital.

But I want to compliment you on your efforts to minimize the downsides, and I say "so far so good." In a way, the new bimonthly publication schedule actually works better for me. One of the few problems I had with a monthly is that I could never get through an entire issue's articles and lessons before the next one arrived. Now I find that two months is easier to process when I can also read the PDF version on my iPad. The expanded issues also have a wider variety of topics, so it is more likely that I will find things that interest me. The May/June issue full of those things for me

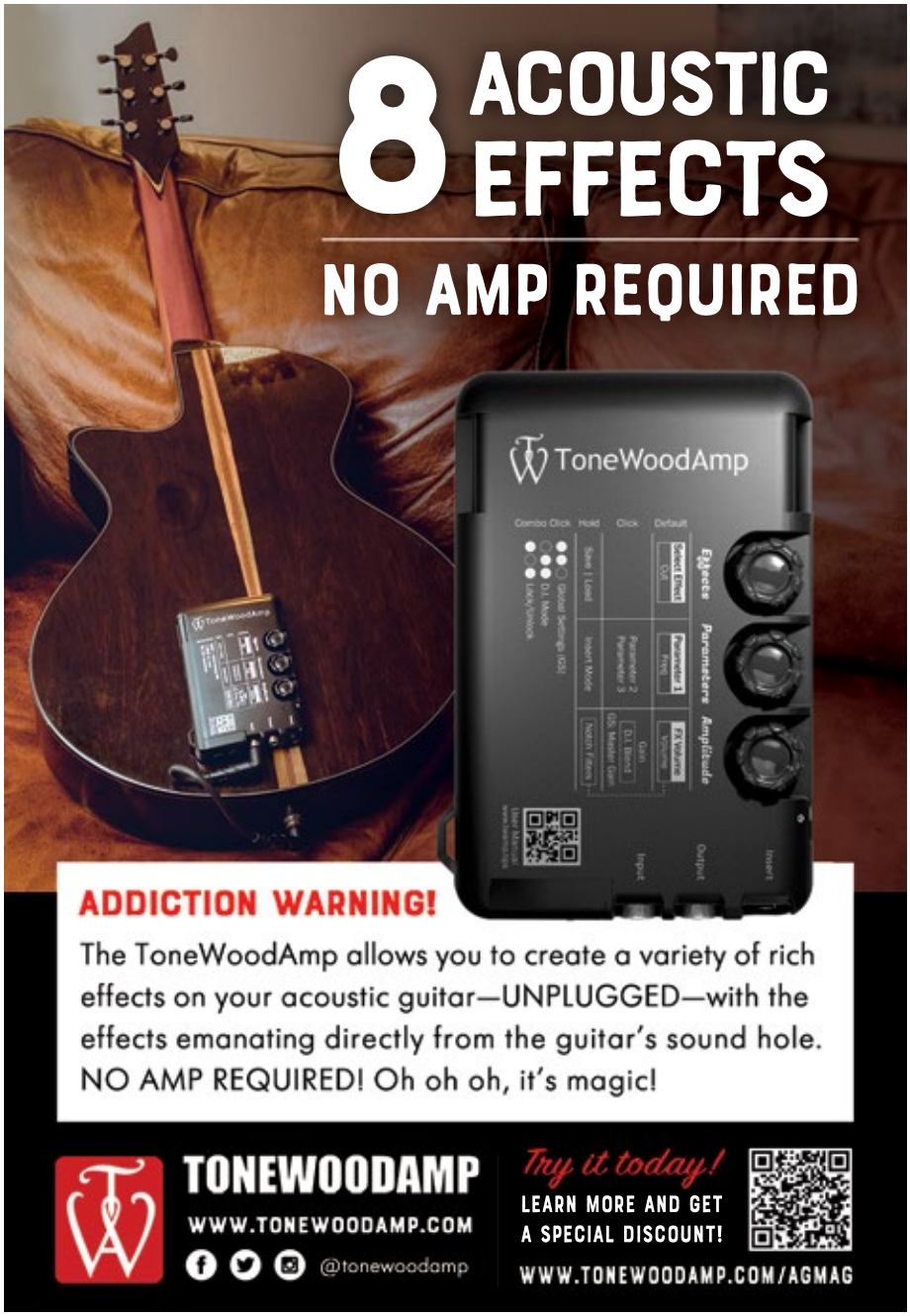
—*Eddie McGehee, via email*

INSTANT GRATIFICATION

I recently subscribed for the first time and was immediately pleased when told I could download the current issue while waiting for my first issue to arrive. The timing was perfect, as I've been switching my focus from electric to acoustic and classical guitar, and this issue highlighted one of the main reasons: the work of Nick Drake. The exercises that accompany the look at his playing were just what I needed to bring some extra heart into my practice, and they are doing wonders for my right hand. That was enough to make this a worthwhile issue, but even before I reached the Drake article, the one on Alan Lomax had me reaching for my Martin, trying to emulate just a touch of the musical voices shared in the notation. There's as much to learn and play in the magazine as there are artists to explore and gear to drool over, and that is wonderful.

—*Sean Hennessey, via email*

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PRS PAUL REED SMITH GUITARS

Alex de Grassi (L) and Andrew York

GUITAR TALK



IRENE YOUNG

Guitars by the Sea

Steel-string master Alex de Grassi and classical guitarist Andrew York team up for annual camp

BY MARK SMALL

There are many options for musicians of all instruments and styles seeking a summer program to help them improve their skills. For acoustic and classical guitarists, however, the Mendocino Guitar Workshop offers a *sui generis* opportunity to spend a week learning from and hanging out with two internationally renowned guitar masters. For the fourth consecutive year, steel-string fingerstylist and composer Alex de Grassi (whose 1998 album *The Water Garden* was nominated for a Grammy) and classical composer and performer Andrew York (who won a Grammy with the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet for 2005's *Guitar Heroes*) are teaming up to mentor intermediate and advanced players. This year's confab runs from July 15–21 at the Albion Field Station in Albion, California, seven miles outside of Mendocino on California's scenic northern coast. The number of participants is capped at 20, offering an intimate music learning environment.

The curriculum is structured to improve each player's ability and overall musicianship by exploring a variety of techniques and expressive skills, including alternate tunings, dynamics, and phrasing. An emphasis on composing and arranging for fingerstyle and/or classical guitar—for which both de Grassi and York are acclaimed—is a distinctive feature of this workshop. Hands-on activities led by de Grassi and York together and separately include master classes, lecture-demonstrations, one-on-one lessons, and ensemble rehearsals in preparation for a public concert held at the end of the week. There's also plenty of time in the schedule for solo practicing, jamming with fellow participants, and communal meals enjoyed together by the teachers and students. Not to be overlooked, of course, is the inspiration from the camp's proximity to the ocean, river, and nearby forests. And in its second year, the camp's Guitars in the Village initiative gives participants the chance to perform casually in boutiques, shops, and galleries around the seaside community of Mendocino.

Additionally, there will be an exhibition of instruments built by top regional luthiers at three local galleries. (See sidebar for a list of participating luthiers.) The program runs

concurrently with the Mendocino Music Festival, which features an array of orchestra, chamber music, big band, folk, pop, jazz, and blues music and dance performances that enhance this arts-immersion experience. "We don't have an official relationship with the music festival; they don't sponsor us," says de Grassi. "They host a series of concerts over the course of two weeks in a 150-seat venue and in a tent set up outside on the cliff overlooking the bay that seats close to 1,000. Both Andy and I played in the big tent in previous years, and I approached festival organizers about our students giving a concert. They let us use the smaller venue, where Andy and I do a concert and our students play ensemble pieces." Guest artists who have dropped by the workshop to teach and perform have included American fingerstylists Ed Gerhard and Sean McGowan, Brazilian singer-guitarist Badi Assad, and French jazz guitarist Serge Merlaud, to name a few.

De Grassi kicked off the annual series two decades ago when he and wife, Alison, began hosting the Alex de Grassi Summer Guitar Intensive for a handful of acoustic guitarists who would gather for a weekend at Laurel Mill Lodge, an old redwood sawmill in the Santa Cruz Mountains. Alex did all the teaching and Alison cooked the meals for participants who stayed in the lodge or camped out on the grounds. Seven years ago, they moved operations to a 19th-century farmhouse at Jug Handle Creek Farm in Caspar, in Mendocino County. The current location, just down the road, is an old biology field station owned by Pacific Union College. "The facilities include dorm rooms, a dining hall, and a big meeting hall there where we can seat 20 players in a circle to work together," de Grassi says. "It looks out on the river and is a really nice spot."

York and de Grassi, who began playing and recording their original duo compositions around 2011, have become close friends. De Grassi taught himself folk and blues as a youth and later looked into classical guitar. York began his journey playing folk-based music before pursuing formal classical studies, so they share plenty of common musical ground. "Alex and I both improvise and have wide stylistic influences and experiences," York says. "I don't find as much of that in the classical world. I feel lucky that we gravitated toward each other. Four years ago, he invited me to teach at the workshop. It's unusual to have festivals that hit both the steel-string and classical sides of the guitar world. My presence has opened doors that bring in more classical players. I've played other festivals, like the Hersbruck Guitar Festival in Germany, where they have classical, Gypsy jazz, and steel-string players. But the people don't interact in quite the same way as we do at Alex's festival: living together, jamming, and doing workshops."

Part of the workshop's magic is that it draws players from various locales and across the age spectrum, from precocious middle- and high-school students to baby boomer pluckers who are professionals in non-music fields. "It's fun to see 13-year-olds learning Dylan songs from people who are 65, and 21-year-olds teaching songs by current artists to the older players," says de Grassi. "Jams will go on sometimes until the wee hours of the morning," York adds. "It's really cool how they respect each other. And it's not just the blend of steel and nylon. We have older amateur players getting together with young, hot-shot classical guys. You watch them get to know and like each other and start playing together. These are people who might not otherwise cross each other's paths in this way. Many of them have become good friends who stay in touch."

'It's unusual to have festivals that hit both the steel-string and classical sides of the guitar world.'
ANDREW YORK

In 2011, the workshop began offering two scholarships. Financial support has come from Strings By Mail owner John Wunsch, Tropo Records, *Acoustic Guitar* magazine, Lowden Guitars, Elixir Strings, Diana Coryat and Ashok Khosla, as well as workshop participant Jeff Titus. "Players under 25 can apply for a tuition-free scholarship," says de Grassi. "We base the decision on their ability and financial need. Many applicants are in some kind of guitar program; some of the classical players are music majors at colleges or universities." De Grassi will offer five scholarships this year, and he hopes to see that number rise.

Zachary Seifert-Ponce, a young classical guitarist and composer who recently graduated from Pacific Union College, attended the 2018 workshop. He says de Grassi and York are "a dream team" as teachers. "They would each pick an element of our playing and zero in on it," he says. "I left with a new level of understanding of how to touch my instrument and express more of its sounds in my own compositions. Interacting with them—learning about their future plans and even how they take their coffee—makes you feel like you're a part of the lives of the giants."

Janet Noguera attended the 2015 workshop on a scholarship from Lowden Guitars while majoring in music at the University of California at Santa Cruz. "At the time, I was studying classical guitar but also playing steel-string with open tunings, percussive techniques, and fingerboard tapping," she recalls. "This workshop was perfect for me, and it was very well organized. Alex has great technique like a classical player, but has a modern style on steel-string. It was really fun playing in the master classes, working as a team on the guitar orchestra piece, and playing it in concert."

Rick Bostock, a baby boomer who has played steel-string guitar since he was 12, has taught and researched plant pathology as a faculty member at the University of California at Davis for 38 years. "Guitar is a serious hobby for me, and I've attended four of Alex's workshops since 2004," Bostock says. "Last year, a 12-year-old lad, college music majors, and hobbyists like myself attended. Andy and Alex are so gracious in their interactions, no matter what your level. You come away reinvigorated and inspired to become a better player. I'm a professor, so I know good teaching when I see it, and Alex and Andy are outstanding."

"I like the cross-fertilization and the disparate energy everyone brings to the workshop," York says. "It's a personal setting where we get to spend time together. For the last couple years, we've taken canoes a few miles up the river on the last day of the workshop, and after the tide turns, we come back down. It's unimaginably beautiful up there in redwood country. I've done many festivals all over the world, but this one is really unique."

To learn more about this year's program or to apply for a scholarship, visit degrassi.com/workshops.

MENDOCINO LUTHIERS

Six local luthiers will exhibit their instruments at three Main Street art galleries in Mendocino during the week of the workshop.

Gregory Byers byersguitars.com

Morgan Daniel morgandaniel.com

David Dart luthier.com

Ken Franklin franklinguitars.com

Rick Micheletti michelettiguitars.com

Steve Porter steveporterguitars.com



THE FRESH IDEAS OF AN 'OLD FOLKIE'

HOW RICHARD THOMPSON HAS BLENDED POPULAR, FOLK, AND CLASSICAL INFLUENCES TO STUNNING EFFECT

BY MAC RANDALL

The final song of Richard Thompson's 2015 album *Still* is called "Guitar Heroes." Over its seven-and-a-half minutes, the distinguished English singer, songwriter, and guitarist takes on the guise of an aspiring picker, a "bebop twang-headed rock 'n' roll fool" who practices incessantly in an attempt to master the licks of his idols. It's a great excuse for Thompson to ape some of his own favorites: Django Reinhardt, Les Paul, Chuck Berry, James Burton, and the Shadows' Hank Marvin. It's also an acknowledgment of sorts that, to many aficionados, Thompson is himself a hero on the order of those greats, a player of astounding skill and originality—which he proves yet again on the song's closing solo, a feast of twisted runs and hair-raising bends that could be no one else's work.

When Thompson plugs in his Stratocaster, fireworks regularly ensue. But his playing is equally brilliant when he picks up a Martin, Ferrington, Lowden, or any number of others and goes unplugged (and in fact, the crucial rhythm part on "Guitar Heroes" is played on an acoustic, as are the Django and part of the Les Paul sections). Lots of fans would argue that Thompson makes much of his best music when he's by himself, with just an acoustic guitar for company. "I was frequently challenged, and still am, by the idea of adapting things off records to play solo," he told me in a 1994 interview. "If it's something that's been recorded with a band, I think, 'Am I just going to strum, strum, strum like some old folkie, or is there something more interesting I can do? Can I suggest the bass line and lead at the same time?' I try to orchestrate, and sometimes when I do that, I come up with new ideas."

On some level, Thompson could indeed be regarded as an "old folkie." After all, he first came to public attention more than 50 years ago as a founding member of the seminal folk-rock band Fairport Convention. But as we'll see in this lesson, his approach to the acoustic guitar is incredibly eclectic, taking in both the traditional and popular musics of Britain, as well as American country and rock and the classical music of Europe and India. And much of his most innovative playing has sprung, at least in part, from his attempts to transfer music associated with another instrument to the guitar—whether that instrument be piano, accordion, or bagpipes.

DAVID KAPTEIN

A young Richard Thompson in his Fairport Convention days



ASHLEY HUTCHINGS

INSISTENT ARTICULATIONS AND LUXURIOUS CHORDS

During Thompson's time with Fairport Convention (1967–1970), the band took the unprecedented step of rearranging British folk songs for rock instrumentation. In general, Thompson played lead electric, leaving most acoustic parts to the underrated Simon Nicol, but **Example 1** is inspired by an exception to that rule: Fairport's arrangement of "Nottamun Town," taken from *What We Did on Our Holidays*, the band's second album and first of three to be released in 1969. While Nicol lays down the 6/8 rhythm on this track, Thompson (with his bottom string dropped down to D for extra drone) handles the melody. Note how frequently he hammers on, pulls off, or slides from one note to another, then immediately picks that second note again. This kind of insistent articulation, reminiscent of various wind-instrument techniques, adds bite to the music and is one of his principal stylistic calling cards. The tricky bend in measure 5, meanwhile, is an indication that, even this early in his career, Thompson was already interested in exploring the links between Dublin, Delhi, and Memphis.

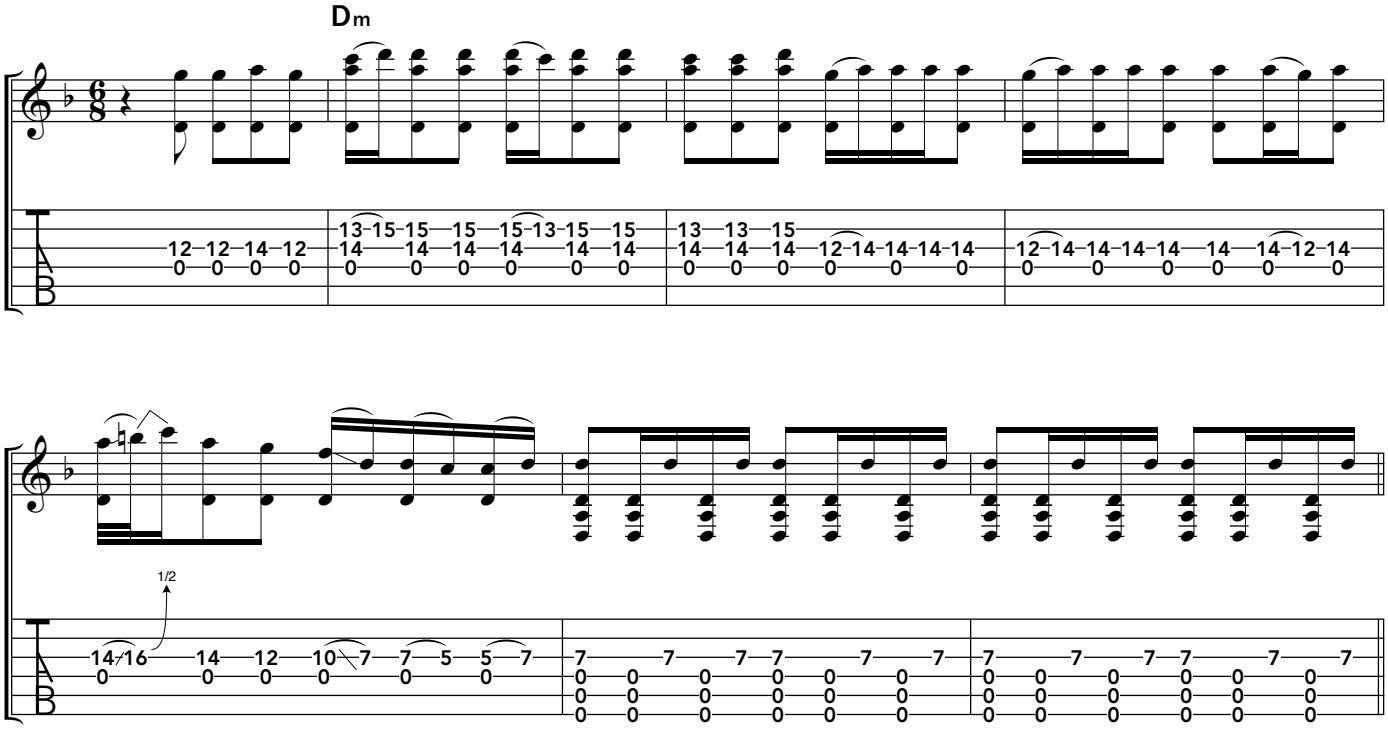
His approach to the acoustic guitar is incredibly eclectic, taking in both the traditional and popular musics of Britain, as well as American country and rock and the classical music of Europe and India.

After splitting with Fairport, Thompson recorded an excellent solo album, 1972's *Henry the Human Fly*, which was undeservedly panned by the British music press and ignored by consumers. But from this discouraging experience came at least one positive result. Shortly after *Henry*'s release, Thompson married Linda Peters, one of the backing vocalists on the album. Together they formed a new duo, billed simply as Richard and Linda Thompson, and proceeded to make some of the most powerful music ever to emerge from the British folk-rock scene.

The songs on the couple's first album, 1974's *I Want to See the Bright Lights Tonight*, all of them written by Richard, are as deeply rooted in British folk as Fairport's. Still, some of the most striking moments exhibit an influence of a different sort: French Impressionist composers like Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel, and Erik Satie. You can hear that in the complex harmony of **Example 2**, based on a sequence from *Bright Lights*' closing track, "The Great Valerio." Two key chords establish a tense, vaguely threatening mood, appropriate for a song about a tightrope walker. Though they are labeled here as Em7♭5/B♭ and G13/A, both are ambiguous, almost diminished chords but not quite. They're also ominous, carrying a sense of foreboding that both the Great Valerio's literal tightrope walk and his observers' figurative one through life are doomed to end in failure. Thompson's debt to Satie in particular is made plain in the song's coda (not seen here), which is a direct lift from "La Balançoire," part of Satie's 1914 cycle of short piano pieces, *Sports et Divertissements*. Note that the guitar is capoed up two frets; Thompson is a frequent capo user, which gives his acoustic playing an extra-crystalline quality.

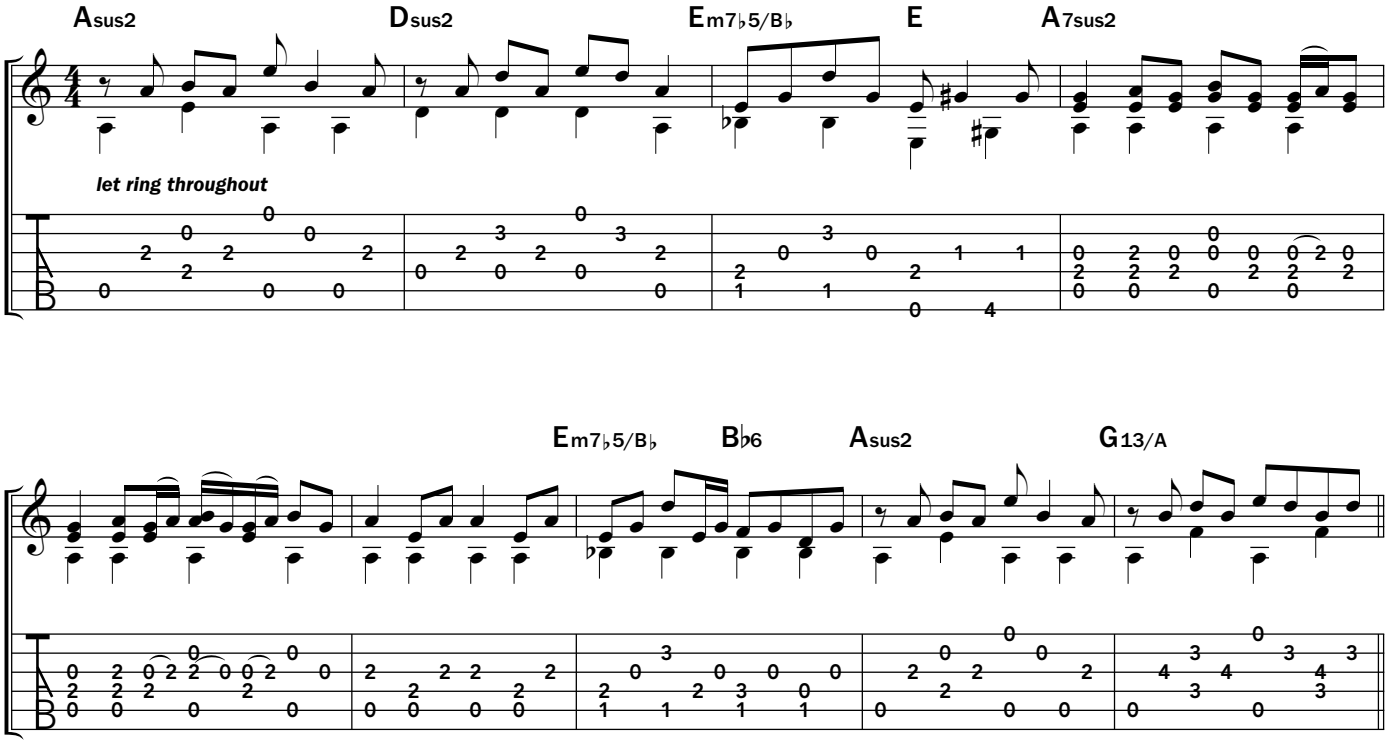
Example 1

Tuning: D A D G B E



Example 2

***Standard tuning, Capo II**



** Music sounds a major second higher than written.*

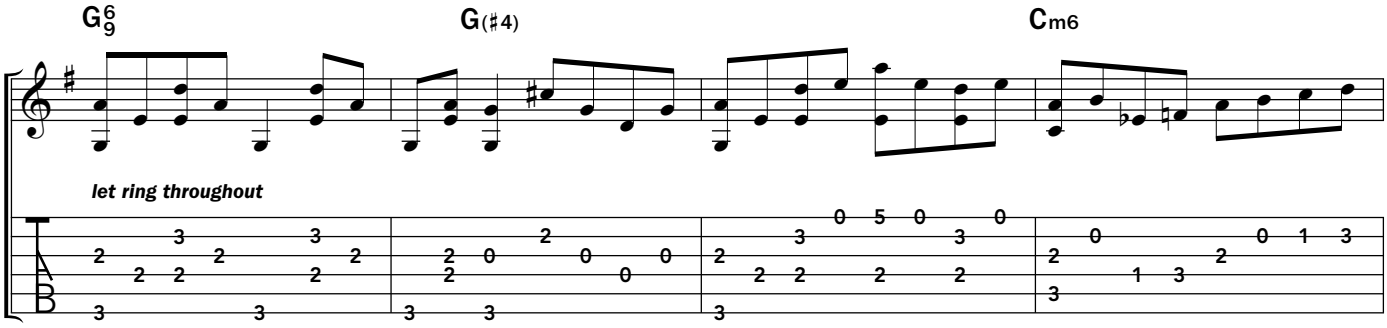
One of Richard and Linda's most enduring ballads, "A Heart Needs a Home," is similarly rich in harmony, but this time the emotional effect is more touching than scary. **Example 3**, drawn from that song, indulges in slow arpeggiations of luxurious chords, beginning with a G6/9 and climaxing on a frankly gorgeous turnaround that implies Cm6 with a major 7th (B) on top. To best capture Thompson's tone, capo your guitar at the fourth fret. The original studio recording of "A Heart Needs a Home," on 1975's *Hokey Pokey*, is lovely, but a live take on the 1993 three-CD Thompson compilation *Watching the Dark* is even better—just two voices, one acoustic guitar, and an enraptured audience.

AN IMPRESSIVE COMMAND OF THE GUITAR

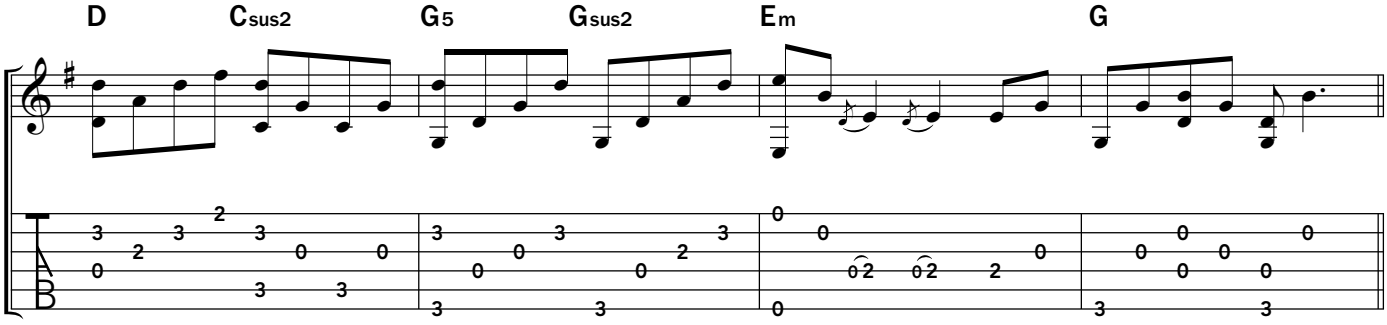
Example 4 picks up the pace with a reel-like line of the sort that you'd normally expect to hear being played by a fiddle or pennywhistle. The song that inspired it, "Time to Ring Some Changes," was originally recorded by British folk-rock group the Albion Band in 1978, but there's no sign of this chops-challenging part in their rendition. Thompson introduced it when he played the song solo in the early '80s; you can hear his version on the live album *Small Town Romance*, recorded at three U.S. concerts in 1982 and released in 1984. Hammer-ons and pull-offs abound, and although the general vibe is totally olde-England, at least one move in measures 4 and 5—the slide up to D on the fifth string, followed by a ringing open D on the fourth—is straight out of Duane Eddy.

At the time *Small Town Romance* was recorded, Richard and Linda Thompson were in the midst of a messy personal and professional split. Since 1982, Richard has been primarily a solo artist, and his command of the guitar has become an even more essential component of his art. As **Example 5** shows, though, that command isn't always—or even usually—demonstrated through obvious showing-off. This example is based on one of Thompson's prettiest tunes,

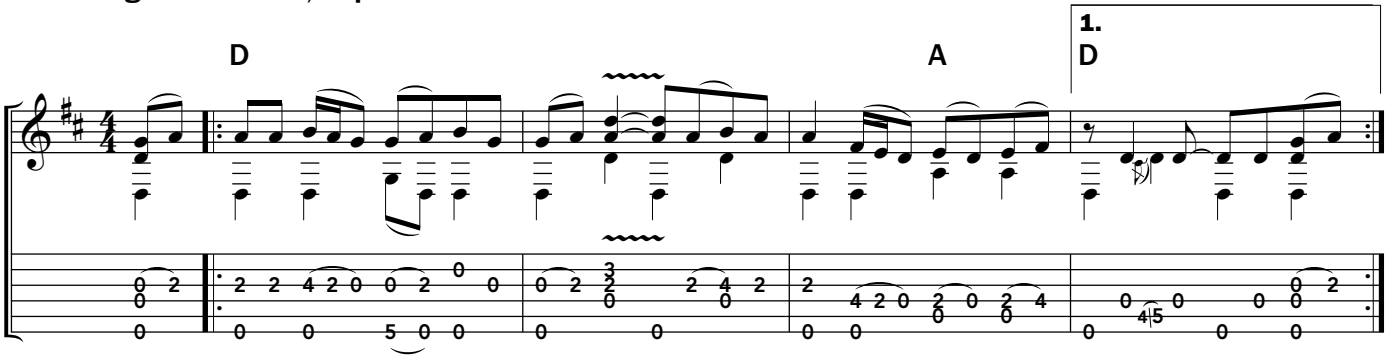
Example 3
***Standard tuning, Capo IV**



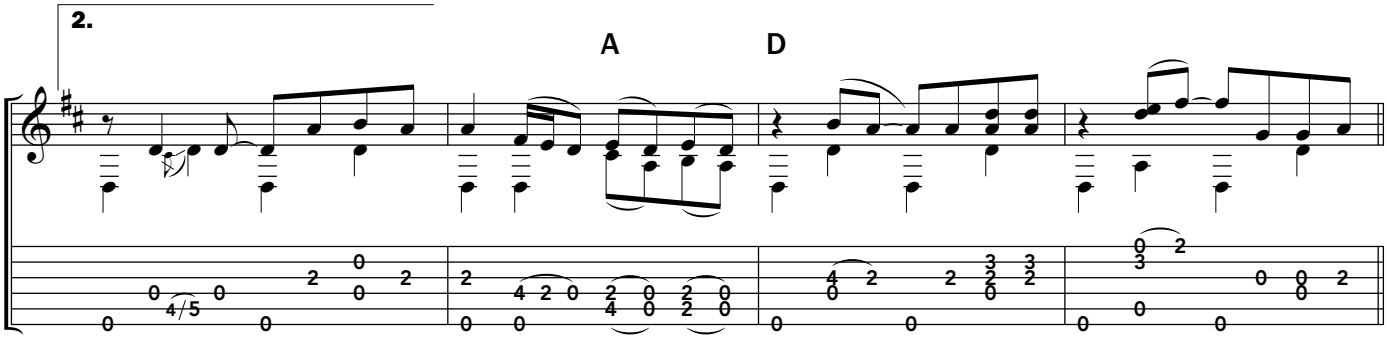
*** Music sounds a major third higher than written.**



Example 4
***Tuning: D A D G B E, Capo III**

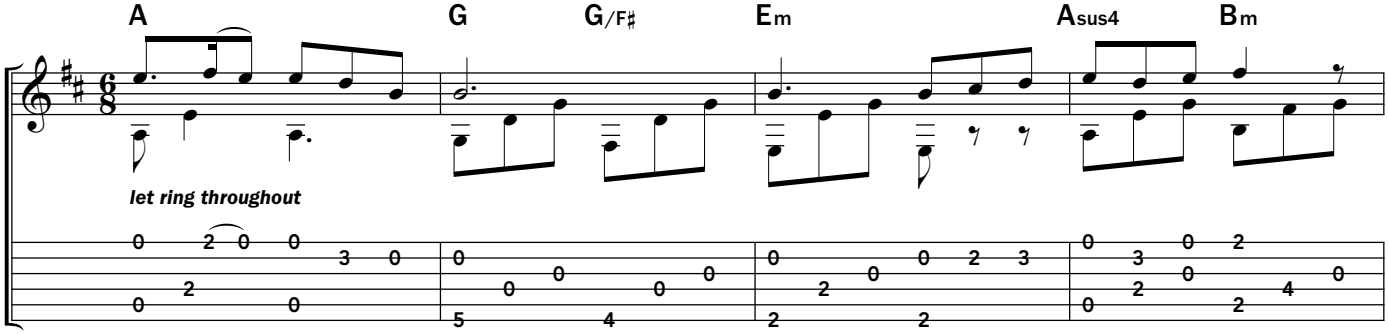


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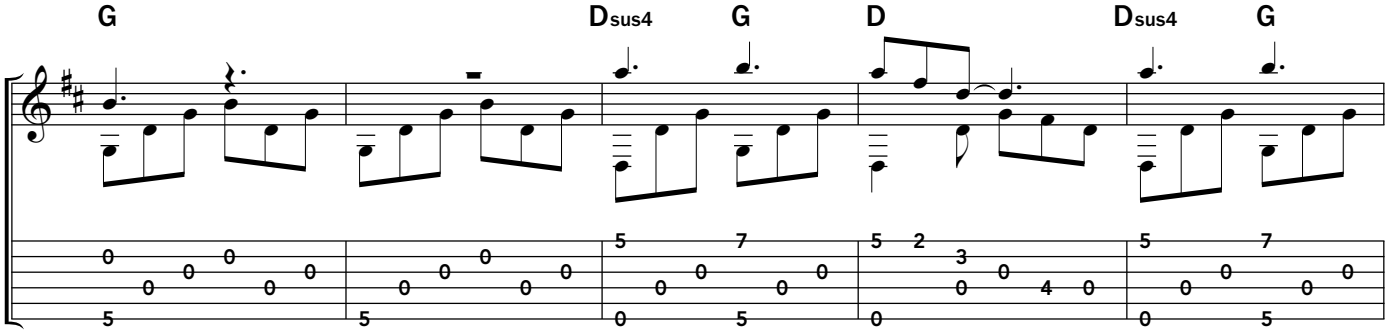


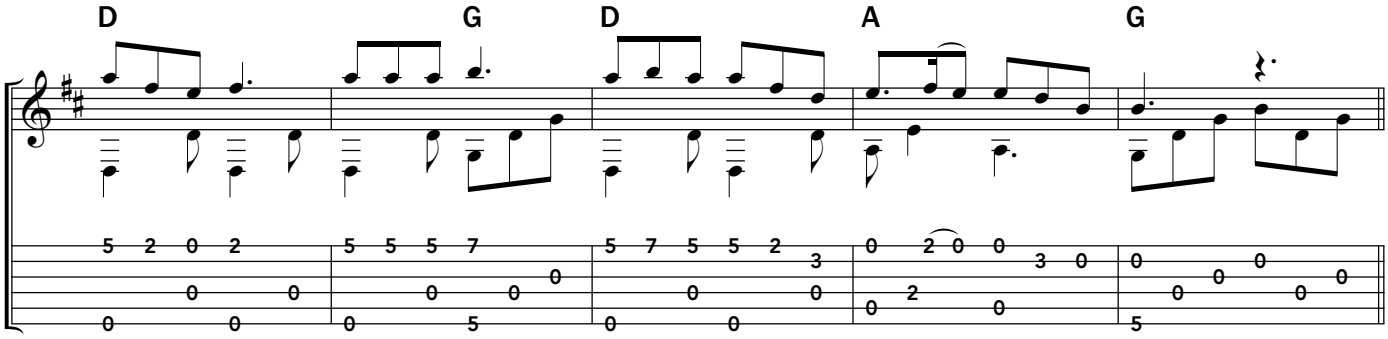
Example 5

***Tuning: D A D G B E, Capo III**



** Music sounds a minor third higher than written.*
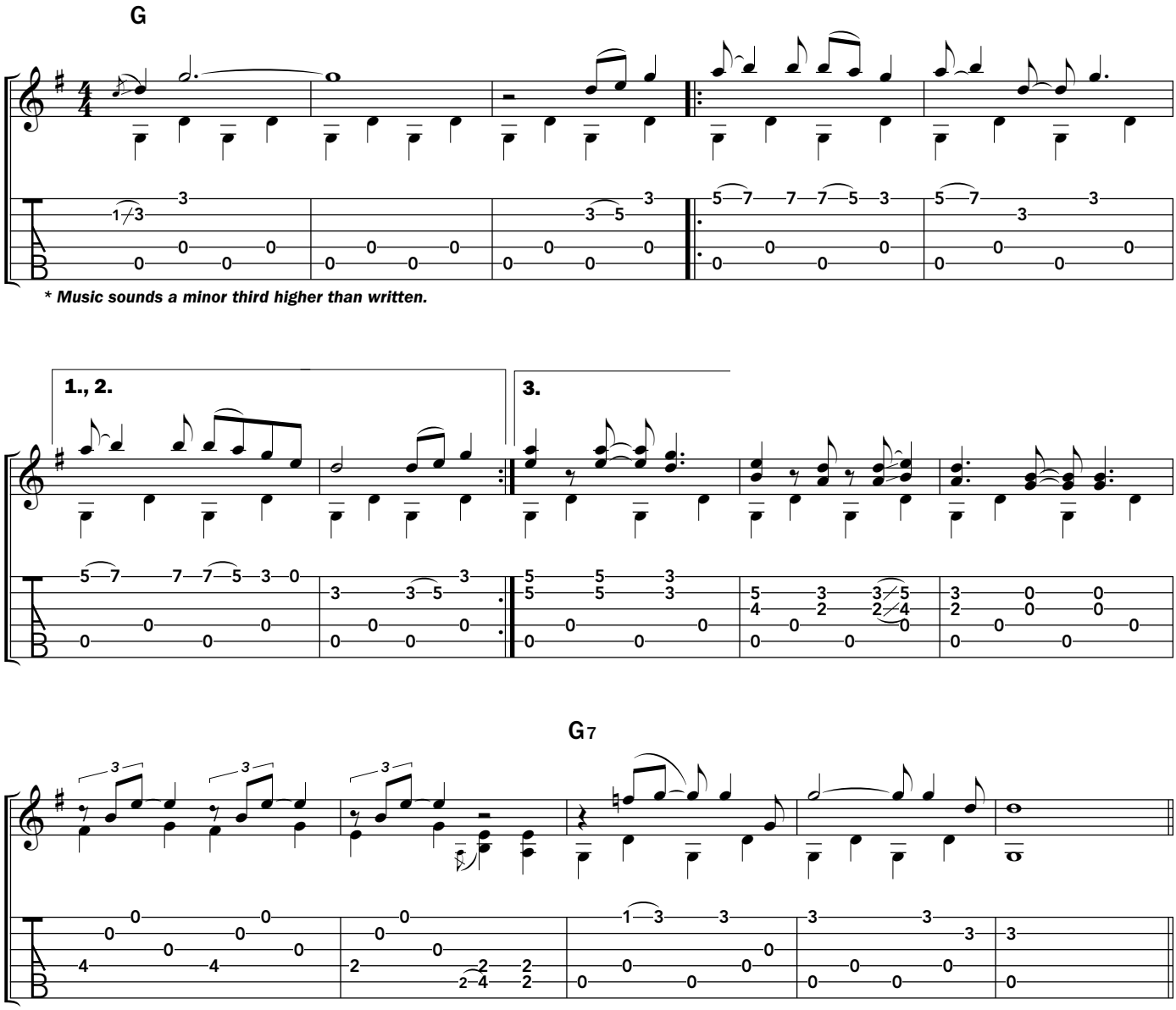




"Beeswing" from 1994's *Mirror Blue*, and it's proof of how subtle he can be as a player, sketching out a melody and chords but never giving the listener too much information at one time. In measures 7 and 9, notice how a G (open third string) is introduced on what ought to be a standard D chord. This serves two purposes: It craftily anticipates the next chord (a G) and opens up the song's harmony, adding to the overall feeling that something important has been left unresolved.

That lack of resolution is a prime characteristic of certain open tunings, like DADGAD—a Thompson favorite—and the slightly more unusual tuning that anchors what is probably his best-known song, "1952 Vincent Black Lightning," originally released on 1991's *Rumor and Sigh*: C G D G B E (like standard tuning, but with strings 5 and 6 tuned town a whole step each). **Example 6**, which takes that song as its inspiration, highlights the curious hybrid nature of "Vincent." While the fingers of the picking hand pluck out a line that's akin to Celtic fiddle playing, the thumb sticks mostly to a steady Merle Travis–style root-and-fifth boom-chuck, maintaining its rhythm even through the rapid triplet flourishes near the end. On this song and a few others, Thompson often uses a thumbpick in conjunction with his first and second fingers; elsewhere, he favors a regular pick teamed with fingers 2 and 3.

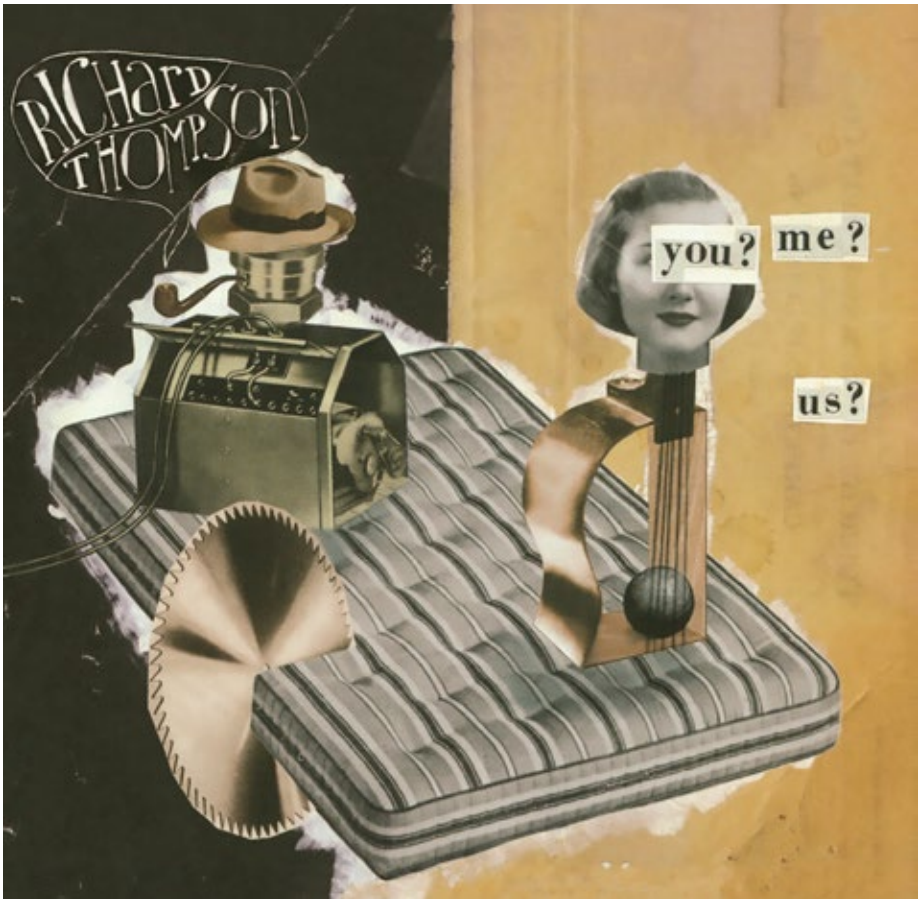
When Thompson plugs in his Stratocaster, fireworks regularly ensue. But his playing is equally brilliant when he picks up a Martin, Ferrington, Lowden, or any number of others and goes unplugged.

Example 6
***Tuning: C G D G B E, Capo III**



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You? Me? Us?, 1996



UNUSUAL TWISTS ON CLASSIC IDIOMS

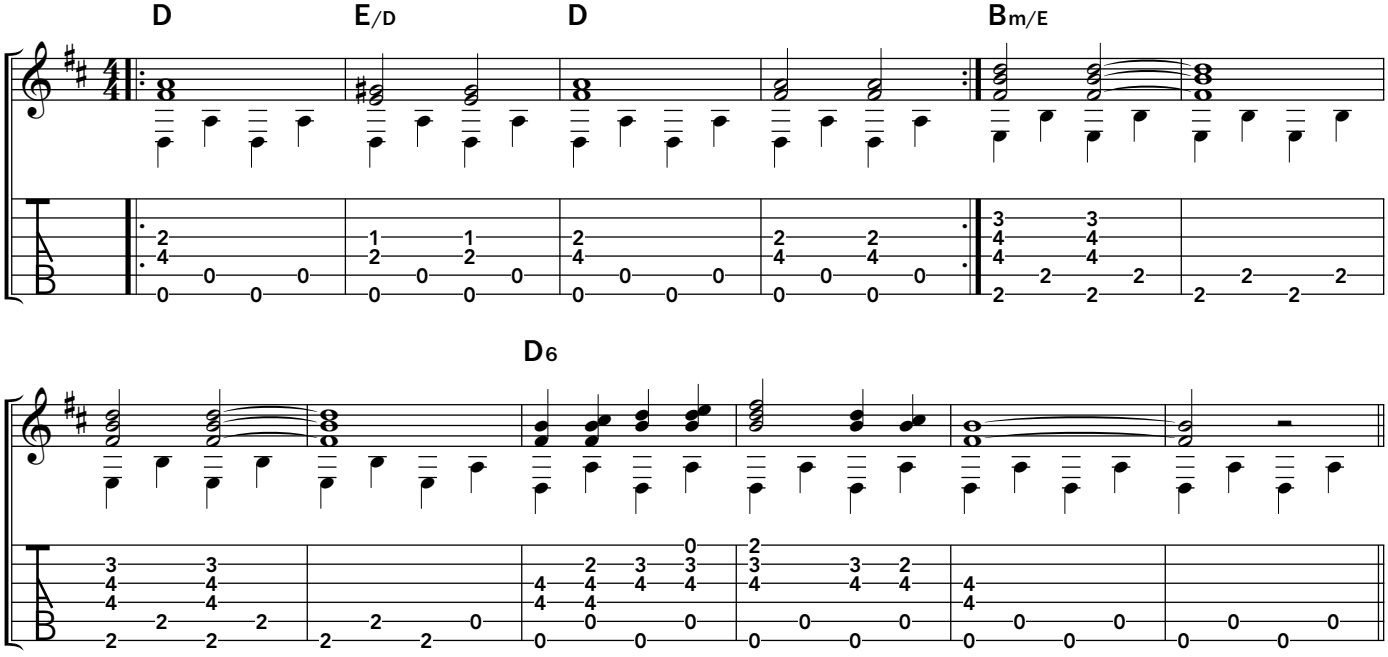
Over the years, fans have come to treasure the ways in which Thompson has recast many of his songs for solo acoustic performance. In the 2010s, he gave a big nod to those fans by recording new all-acoustic versions of 42 selections from his huge back catalog and releasing them on three albums: *Acoustic Classics* (2014), *Acoustic Classics II* (2017), and *Acoustic Rarities* (2017). (See page 54 for a transcription of "She Twists the Knife Again," from *Acoustic Classics II*.) These albums make an excellent introduction both to Thompson's songwriting and to his acoustic guitar playing.

Example 7 is based on the *Acoustic Classics II* version of "The Ghost of You Walks." Like "1952 Vincent Black Lightning," it's oriented around a simple root-fifth bass pattern handled by the thumb of the picking hand, only this time the tempo is much more relaxed. And like "The Great Valerio" and "A Heart Needs a Home," it trades in beautiful Debussy-ish harmonic ideas, particularly the Lydian shading of E major over D and the resolution to a D6 chord, which then acquires major-7th and major-9th blossoms thanks to the upper-register melody.

Finally, **Example 8**—inspired by "Razor Dance" on 1996's *You? Me? Us?*—reveals another key Thompson influence: Who-style power pop (he's been known to cover the Who's "Substitute" in concert). The driving

Example 7

***Tuning: D A D G B E, Capo II**



** Music sounds a major second higher than written.*

rhythm sequence at the start and 16th-note chord slashes at the end are evidence of deep drinking from Pete Townshend's well. But you've got to admit that the bit in-between is from somewhere else entirely: a tricky, constantly moving bass line shadowed by a high drone that then mirrors the downward motion of its low-end companion for just long enough to confuse the fingers on your picking hand. Passages like these make it plain that, although Thompson's playing can be easily identified, it can never be pigeonholed.

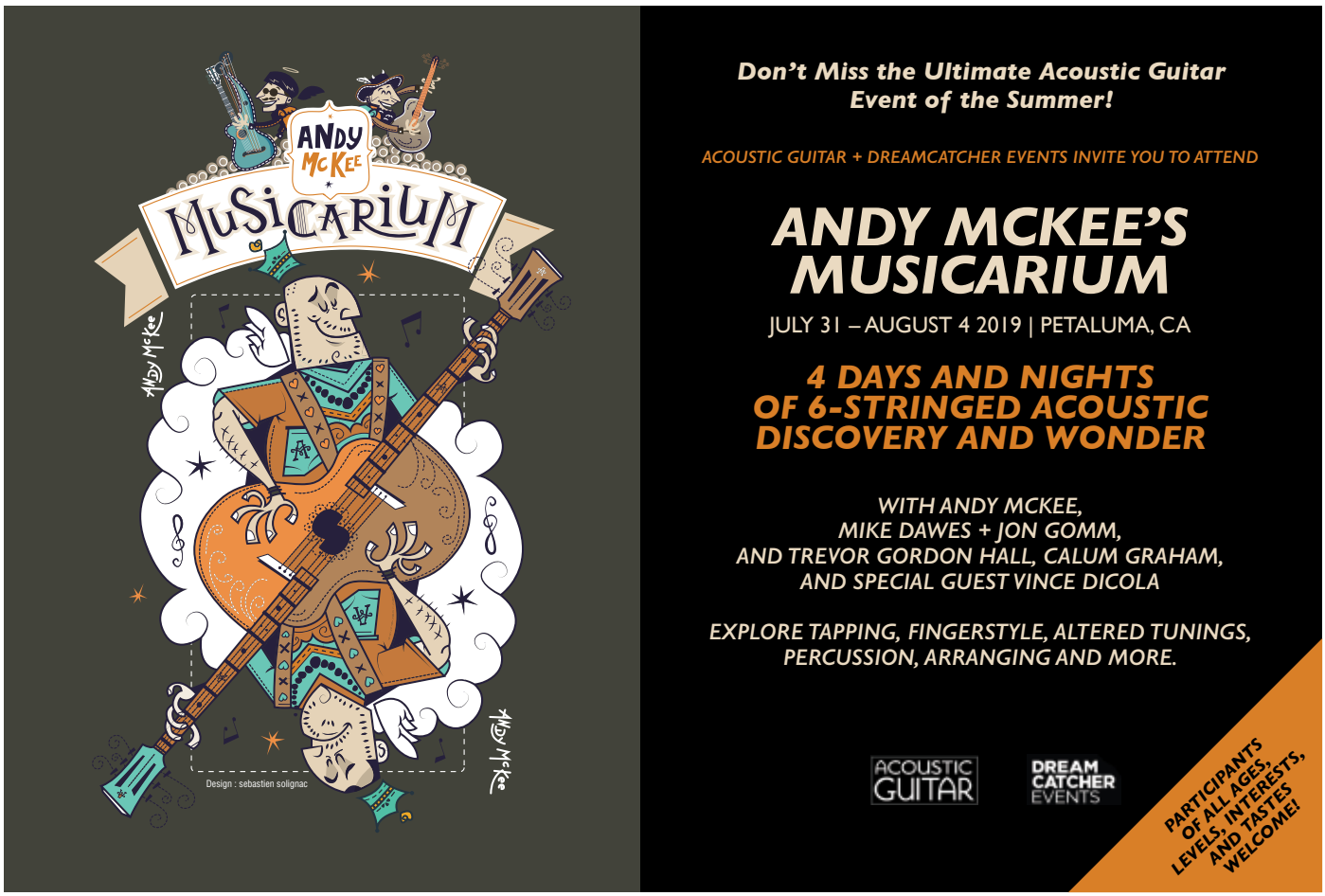
As we noted toward the start of this article, Richard Thompson's guitar style incorporates ideas and techniques from a wide range of genres. But interestingly, there's one major genre you won't hear much of in his playing: the blues. And it's not because he doesn't love the work of Robert Johnson or B.B. King. Think back to what was going on in pop, particularly in England, when Fairport Convention first emerged in 1967. London was loaded with guitar heroes—Eric Clapton, Peter Green, Jeff Beck, Jimmy Page—all of them playing music that was largely derived from American blues. How could anyone hope to compete in such a star-heavy marketplace? By sounding different. That's at least part of the reason why Thompson quickly put aside his Gibson Les Paul (a model that the four aforementioned guitarists had all famously played) in favor of a Strat, and why he and Fairport chose to look to the musical history of their own country for inspiration.



PETER SANDERS

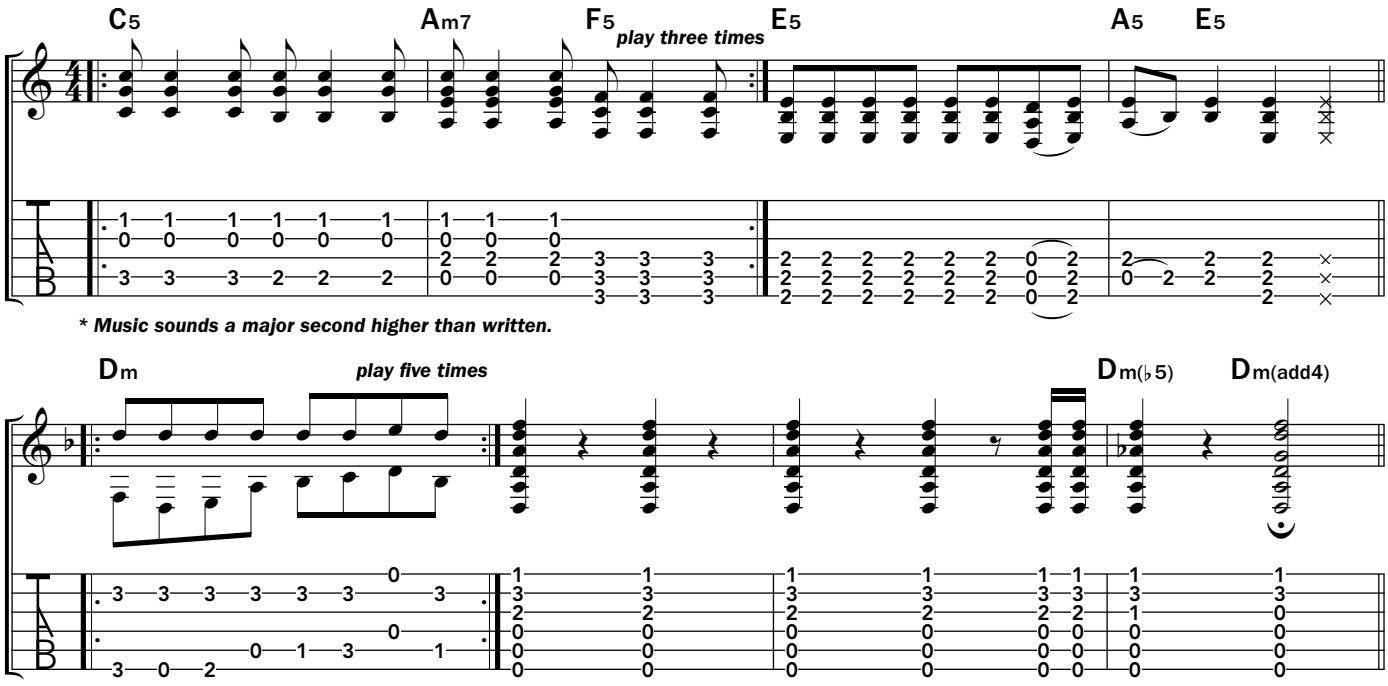
"We got to a point," Thompson said in a 2015 interview with *Premier Guitar*, "where we thought, 'We will never play the blues as good as somebody from Chicago.' We'd never been to Chicago—never even to America. . . . If we played music that was more indigenous, music that reflected where we came from, we stood a chance to excel and to be the best in our field."

Five decades and more than 50 albums later, there's little doubt that Thompson *has* excelled, and that he made a sharp creative choice—one that more would-be artists might benefit from considering. AG



Example 8

***Tuning: D A D G B E, Capo II**



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♫ J2B2
♫ JigJam
♫ Chris Jones & the Night Drivers
♫ Christie Lenée Trio
♫ Ashley Lewis & Legacy
♫ Matchsellers / Bluegrastronauts
♫ Andy May
♫ Tim May & Steve Smith
♫ John McCutcheon
♫ Old Salt Union
♫ Barry Patton
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SLIDE MASTER

6 GUITARISTS WHO PLAY BOTTLENECK STYLE IN FRESH AND UNEXPECTED WAYS BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

It's not possible to know the exact specifics, but at some point near the beginning of the 20th century, a random musician in the Mississippi Delta must have rubbed a guitar's strings with a knife, glass bottle, or other hard object, and in doing so discovered that the instrument could be made to produce an eerily vocal-like sound. At around the same time, the Hawaiian musician Joseph Kekuku pioneered the steel guitar by using a steel bar on the strings for a similar effect.

While the origins might be murky, it's clear that slide guitar became popular with blues guitarists like Robert Johnson and Son House and Hawaiian musicians such as Sol Hoopii in the first half of the 20th century, to say nothing of country-and-western and bluegrass musicians like Noel Boggs and Leon McAuliffe. The sound of an open-tuned instrument played with a slide is inextricably associated with these styles and their offshoots, and American popular music in general.

But in the century since slide guitar became a common practice, the technique has been used in just about any imaginable context from rock to jazz and beyond, on acoustic, electric, and resonator guitar, lap and pedal steel, and other stringed instruments. The six musicians showcased here—Harry Manx, Steve Dawson, Doug Wamble, Ross Hammond, Marisa Anderson, and Debashish Bhattacharya—show just how wide a range of concepts, sounds, and inflections can be brought to life with slide technique.

HARRY MANX

Harry Manx was a young teenager when he bought his first blues album—Johnny Winter's *The Progressive Blues Experiment*—and instantly fell in love with the sound of the slide guitar. He eventually got around to tuning a guitar to open D, placing it across his lap, and teaching himself to play slide with a socket wrench. "In those days [the late 1960s and early '70s], there weren't really any teaching materials available, so I had to work it out by ear," Manx says. "Listening to Ry Cooder, David Lindley, and Jerry Douglas, I was able to hear the possibilities."

Manx, who dropped out of high school at 14, says his education came from working as a soundman at the El Mocambo blues club in Toronto and seeing great blues players like Muddy Waters and Willie Dixon up close. He began his life as a professional musician by busking in Europe in the mid-1970s, finishing up this itinerant work in the late 1990s in Japan. Manx, now his mid-60s, says, "I spent a lot of time playing other people's songs and making a decent living. Then at some point in my mid-30s, I realized that I really wanted to



play more slide. My first few attempts were very frustrating, but after practicing slide for three hours every day, I quickly got better. With my right hand, I started to develop a kind of slap that would indicate the beat while I was picking, and I could see my street audience getting into it more."

In the 1980s, Manx travelled frequently between India and Japan, and one day while busking in the latter country, he followed some interesting sounds into a small record shop and learned that he was hearing Indian classical music. "What an awakening I had that day," Manx says. "Upon returning to India, I went immediately to Rajasthan to find Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, the creator of the *mohan veena* (a 20-string slide guitar). I arrived at his doorstep late in the evening and pretty much laid my life at his feet. He accepted me as his student and gave me a veena. What a joy and a blessing it was to be close to the mountain of talent and graciousness that he is."

Though Manx admits he never became a great Indian classical musician, he did find a way to incorporate the music's feel and depth into everything he does today—including his latest album, *Hell Bound for Heaven* (Stony Plain), with the Canadian multi-instrumentalist Steve Marriner. Through his travels, both literal and figurative, Manx has arrived at a unique slide style that is equal parts Eastern and Western. "My blues is a little Indian, and my Indian is a little bluesy," he says.

WHAT HE PLAYS

Manx's main instrument is a Taylor 710, set up for lap-style play in a D-based tuning—either D A D F♯ A D (D major), D A D F A D (D minor), or D A D F♯ A C♯ (D major seventh). The guitar is outfitted with a Sunrise pickup, which Manx plugs into a Universal Audio preamp. He also has a National Style 0; a Gold Tone model Banjitar six-string banjo (tuned to open C); and a four-string cigar box instrument (tuned F F C F), made by the luthier Grant Wickland. Manx uses acrylic nails on his picking hand, a Dunlop Lap Dawg tonebar, and assorted Elixir strings.

STEVE DAWSON

Growing up in Vancouver, British Columbia, in the 1980s, Steve Dawson enjoyed playing typical rock-band fare on the electric guitar. He figured he'd become a serious musician and study jazz when he enrolled at the Berklee College of Music in Boston, but things took a sudden turn when he arrived. "That's where I got into acoustic guitar seriously, as well as dobro, country music, bluegrass, and fingerpicking," he says.

After college, Dawson worked with various bands but grew weary of playing in loud bars, where the clientele was less than attentive, so he formed an acoustic duo, Zubot & Dawson, with fiddler Jesse Zubot. The duo toured all over the world and found success, which Dawson has leveraged into a busy and multifaceted career. Now based in Nashville, the guitarist splits his time between serving as a sideman for musicians like Matt Andersen and Birds of Chicago, recording and touring in support of his own music, and working as a producer for "whoever comes calling that I think I could work well with," as he puts it.

Harry Manx



Steve Dawson



Doug Wamble



Dawson, who estimates that 80 percent of his work involves a slide, plays both in conventional position and lap-style on the Weissenborn; he also does a good bit of pedal steel. As opposed to a fully open tuning like E, D, G, or A, he usually opts for double dropped D, in which strings 1 and 6 are tuned to D, as he finds this arrangement most practical. "That allows me to play all the slide stuff I want," he explains, "while also getting through entire songs without playing slide."

Whether playing with the slide or without, Dawson draws from a deep well of influences—the blues and rock canon in general, guitar greats like Doc Watson and Chet Atkins, eclectic stylists like Ry Cooder and David Lindley, and much more, as can be heard on his latest album, *Lucky Hand* (Black Hen Music). "I even got pretty deep into Hawaiian music for a while and did some work with Bob Brozman, who showed me all kinds of stuff," Dawson says. "It's been all over the map."

WHAT HE PLAYS

Dawson's go-to acoustic for live performance is an early 1990s Larrivée JV-05, a cutaway jumbo outfitted with a Sunrise pickup. In the studio, Dawson gravitates toward a 1955 Gibson J-50, a 1927 National Style O, and a Martin OO-DB Jeff Tweedy signature model, plus a Celtic Cross Instruments Weissenborn. He often plugs into a Fender Deluxe and uses Strymon Flint, Catalinbread Belle Epoch, JHS SuperBolt, and Dingtotone HZD Boost effects pedals. His guitars are strung with various D'Addarios, and he prefers a no-name lead crystal slide for bottleneck and a Dunlop 925 Ergo tonebar for lap-style play.

DOUG WAMBLE

As a teenager in Memphis, Tennessee, in the mid-to-late 1990s, Doug Wamble was surrounded by old-timey music. His mother was the house pianist in their Baptist church, and his maternal grandfather, an amateur but dedicated musician, played gospel and country songs on his guitar at home. Wamble started on the clarinet and, watching clips of the Benny Goodman Sextet on television, got inspired by Goodman's guitarist, Charlie Christian. "That's what started it for me," Wamble says. "I took up guitar at the same time as I got into jazz."

Wamble, who studied music at the University of North Florida and Northwestern University in Chicago, made the time-honored move to New York in 1997. Thanks to a fortuitous connection with Wynton Marsalis, the trumpeter, composer, and artistic director of Jazz at Lincoln Center, Wamble found work very quickly. Within a week he had a gig with Madeleine Peyroux, and he first recorded as a sideman for Marsalis on the bandleader's 1999 album *Big Train*. Wamble stepped out on his own with 2003's *Country Libations*, on which he views jazz though a lens of gospel and blues—an approach that has characterized his work in general. "I've always been guided by a love of American roots music," he says.

Wamble estimates that he plays slide guitar about 60 percent of the time. He got into slide not through learning the work of the old blues masters but by adapting the mannerisms of the great jazz horn players. "I was aware of [adventurous electric slide guitarist] David Tronzo from reading guitar magazines, but it was years before I ever got to hear him," Wamble says. "For me, it actually all started by trying emulate the distinctive vibratos of Johnny Hodges and Sidney Bechet—I just loved how vocal they sounded."

Great slide moments abound on Wamble's latest project—*9 for '19* (available via Bandcamp)—a collection of nine albums to be released one per month from April through December of 2019. On a previously unreleased octet arrangement of "Sleepytime" (the old standard "When It's Sleepy Time Down South"), Wamble opens with the most impeccable bottleneck solo against a warm backdrop of horns. "Slide allows a guitarist a great opportunity to be the bridge between horns and the rhythm section," he says. "I can solo, play written lines with horns, or slip back into rhythm playing. I love that freedom."

WHAT HE PLAYS

For slide guitar, Wamble prefers his Mule Resophonic tricone or his 1929 National Triolian. He uses assorted D'Addario strings, Planet Waves Nylpro picks, and a Shubb AXYS reversible guitar slide.

ROSS HAMMOND

Ross Hammond, a native of Lexington, Kentucky, had a familiar musical trajectory in his formative years. As a teenager, he played mostly rock and blues on the electric guitar, but while attending California State University, Sacramento in the mid-1990s, he got into jazz and improvisation. Around the same time, he began working at Fifth String Music, a shop that specialized in acoustic instruments and served as a center for regional folk and bluegrass scenes. "There were a lot of great players that either taught there or were regulars, and it was probably the best education one could get on the guitar," Hammond says.

After college, Hammond spent a decade playing electric guitar and working on building an improv scene in the Sacramento area. But when he became a father, in 2010, he shifted his focus to the acoustic, concentrating on playing blues and *raga* (basically, the framework for melodic improvisation in Indian classical music) on bottleneck and acoustic lap steel. "After I became a dad, I wanted to be home more, and I started playing solo. I felt it was time to unplug," he says. "And it felt right, as a way to play blues, world music, and the spirituals and gospel songs I knew growing up in Kentucky," he says.

These days Hammond plays acoustic slide almost exclusively, save for the occasional fretted chord, as heard on his latest album, *Riding Dragons in Winter* (Prescott Recordings). He has not lost his affinity for improvisation and tends to avoid through-composed pieces,

Ross Hammond



LOLA HAMMOND

Marisa Anderson



Debashish Bhattacharya



instead exploring spontaneous variations on short pre-composed themes. "Slide is great for that, he says. "The raga and improv music lends itself to being able to compose on the fly, and to trust yourself and trust your ears. And the slide is the closest thing I've found on guitar to the human voice, so it's pretty easy to get lost in the sounds the slide makes and then wake up about 30 minutes later."

WHAT HE PLAYS

Hammond's main acoustic guitar is a Pleinview Guitars Small Jumbo made by the luthier Raymond Morin. Hammond also plays a baritone lap resonator and a 12-string lap resonator, both by Turkey Tone (luthier Chris Harvey), as well as a Republic resonator guitar for bottleneck slide. For fingerpicking, Hammond uses Dunlop and Acri fingerpicks and Fred Kelly Slick Pick thumbpicks, and for flatpicking, a Dunlop Gator pick (2.00mm). On acoustic guitar, he prefers a Dunlop 228 chromed brass slide, opting for a Dunlop Lap Dawg on steel guitar. If the occasion calls for it, he amplifies his instruments using the Lace Ultra Slim Acoustic Sensor and plugging into either a ZT Lunchbox or Lunchbox Acoustic amp.

MARISA ANDERSON

Marisa Anderson might spend less time on slide than the other guitarists featured here—she estimates that about a third of her current work uses the bottleneck—and she plays acoustic as often as electric. But a deep connection to acoustic slide guitar is apparent in her work, which is always earthy and occasionally strange. "I love the notes between the notes, the journey of getting from one known place to another by traveling through the sonic space. It's literal and physical, moving an object along the neck of the guitar," she says.

Anderson, based in Portland, Oregon, began playing guitar in the early 1980s, when she was around ten. Though her first loves were country and folk, she began on classical guitar and later studied with guitarist Nina Gerber, who taught her to improvise—an aspect that has remained a big part of her music. "Traditional American music is an improvised music. Common themes and characters, phrases, and melodic fragments show up all over American music," Anderson says. "The way I approach those common elements is similar to the way a jazz player might draw from the jazz tradition to create new work or cover a standard."

Anderson also relishes some of the improvisational details that come as byproducts of playing with the slide, as is heard on the track "Lament" from her latest album, *Cloud Corner* (Thrill Jockey). "I love the unintended noises and transients that accompany slide playing, as well as the way that the style allows me to vary my timing as I move from one position to another," she says. "When playing slide, I can't control everything the way I can when I play conventionally, and I feel like some great moments happen when I respond to the unexpected."

WHAT SHE PLAYS

Anderson's main guitars for playing slide include a 1930s Dobro Model 27, a Gibson ES-339, a mid-1960s Fender Stratocaster, a Dickerson lap steel, and a Sho-Bud single-neck pedal steel. She makes her own slides from the necks of wine bottles, and she favors assorted D'Addario strings.

DEBASHISH BHATTACHARYA

As the son of Indian classical vocalists, Debashish Bhattacharya might have been destined for musical greatness, but he was much younger than most—only three years old to be exact—when he received his first guitar and learned to play it. "I was playing around in the orchard of our village home one afternoon when my mom gave me a very old Hawaiian [lap style] six-string guitar," Bhattacharya, a major proponent of Hindustani slide guitar, remembers. "The joy of having it on my lap was mixed with surprise, and then my mom squeezed on picks and showed me how to play *sa re ga ma* [the first four notes of the octave in Indian classical music]."

Bhattacharya, now in his mid-50s, first heard Western slide guitar on All India Radio (on which he also debuted at age four) as a small child in the late 1960s. He found the music a "sloppy act," as he remembers it—at least relative to the pristine Indian classical music that was in his DNA—so he worked out a way to reconcile these seemingly disparate worlds. "God helped me by adding the idea in my brain to practice more staccatos and develop faster and finer wrist [control], to build a new technology of slide guitar playing," Bhattacharya explains.

Bhattacharya's trademark brand of Hindustani slide guitar is indebted equally to his Indian roots and to Western influences—not just in terms of the open tunings used by many American slide guitarists, but the virtuosic improvisation of idioms like jazz and fusion. This is especially apparent on Bhattacharya's 2013 album *Beyond the Ragasphere* (Riverboat Records), which features guitarist John McLaughlin and steel player Jerry Douglas. "Western influences haven't confused me, but rather have empowered me," Bhattacharya says.

WHAT HE PLAYS

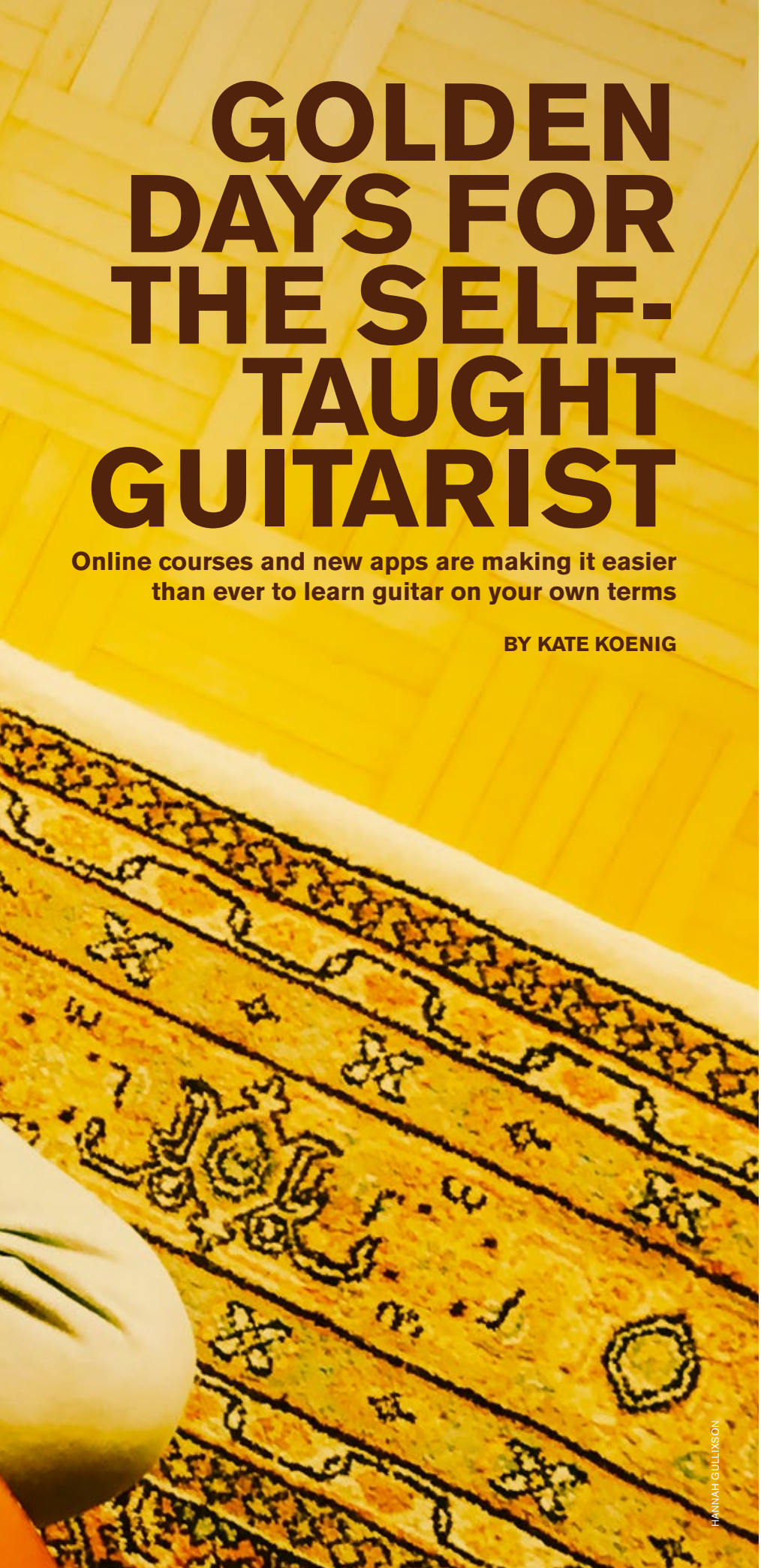
Early on in his musical development, Bhattacharya realized that he needed specialized gear to realize his visions, and in 1978, when he was 15, he made his own instrument. His self-designed "Trinity of Guitars" now includes the *chaturangui*, a 23-string combination sitar/sarod/violin/rudra veena; the *gandharvi*, a 12-string guitar/veena/santoor/sarangi; and the *anandi*, a slide ukulele. Bhattacharya says, "These aren't slide instruments I picked up and followed; rather I've created them by following my growth and passion for playing music. It's been a journey of mine for more than five decades, and I feel I have much more to create and share." AG



GOLDEN DAYS FOR THE SELF-TAUGHT GUITARIST

Online courses and new apps are making it easier than ever to learn guitar on your own terms

BY KATE KOENIG



HANNAH GULLIXSON

There are several reasons why traditional music lessons aren't for everyone. In a practical sense, you may not be able to afford them. Or maybe you just don't have the time to fit a regular lesson into your week *and* devote additional hours to practicing. Or perhaps, for whatever reason, taking lessons is just not how you want to learn.

Being a self-taught guitarist (or musician in general) in 2019 is as well-accommodated as it ever has been, mostly because of the wide variety of apps, software, and websites to choose from. "It's changed the way we think about the self-taught musician," says Dr. Bryan Powell, founding co-editor of the *Journal of Popular Music Education* and chair-elect of the National Association for Music Education. "Now the 'self-taught musician' has a lot of teachers. Keeping our goals in mind while we survey resources will help us find the right ones that are going to work for us."

Aside from the resources that can be found on YouTube, and apart from the many apps that can make the process easier, there is a bounty of pre-structured, all-in-one courses that are customizable enough to suit beginning, intermediate, and even advanced players. They fall under two main categories: immersive software programs and online lesson databases. Of course, having so many options can be fatiguing when it comes to making the right choice. Here are some of the most popular and renowned programs to help you get started.

THE IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE

Best for beginners, **Yousician** is an immersive software package that engages users in a new way. Founded in 2011 by Chris Thür and Mikko Kaipainen, the company's first program, WildChords, was designed as a video game for children. A few years later, they produced Yousician, which offers lessons on guitar, bass, ukulele, piano, and as of 2018, voice. It's available for Mac and PC, as well as in an app version for Android and Apple devices.

For guitar, Yousician offers a series of lessons with three initial paths to choose from: Lead, Rhythm, and Knowledge. Each offers slightly different customized study, but the basic structure is the same for most lessons: You watch a video of an instructor explaining a technique, and then you play an exercise that allows you to practice it.

The exercises are what make the program unique. A backing track plays as tab-style notation scrolls past on a fretboard—to earn points and pass the exercise, students have to play the notes accurately and on rhythm. The coolest thing about Yousician is that you don't need anything more than a guitar and a working microphone on your device or computer—the program processes the sound of your guitar and can tell if you're playing the notes correctly, even when the music gets more fast-paced and

Yousician



Rocksmith



Guitar Tricks



JamPlay



ArtistWorks



complex. Through the help of this audio signal-processing tech, you get valuable feedback on note and rhythmic accuracy.

Yousician teaches through songs, and structures the course based on your skill level. You also can't progress to the next lesson until you've completed the previous one. One interesting feature is that if you're in a rush, you can enter the amount of time you have to practice, and the program will offer you a lesson that fits. The program also comes with a musical toolkit, which includes exercises for learning and practicing chords, standard notation, scales, and arpeggios, as well as collections of songs to practice fingerpicking styles, barre chords, and songs that belong to certain genres.

While the program is effectively structured and a fun, engaging tool, one drawback is that the songs are limited. Other learning methods include access to almost any popular song you're interested in learning how to play; when using Yousician, you're limited to covers of popular songs and traditional, public-domain folk songs.

Another commercially popular immersive software system for learning guitar is **Rocksmith**—a program that essentially allows you to play the popular video game *Guitar Hero* on a real guitar, available on PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, and Microsoft Windows. In comparison to Yousician, Rocksmith doesn't offer as much educational value or rudimentary exercises. It can, however, act as a fun practice tool for intermediate to advanced players.

THE ONLINE EXPERIENCE

Aside from some smart and helpful apps—which we'll touch on a bit later—immersive software is where you'll find the most benefits that come in the way of what modern technology has to offer. More than gimmicks, those features are useful—but in other ways, there's nothing better than the basic instructional tools that can be found in our other main category: online databases.

One of the most highly recommended online databases for learning to play guitar is **GuitarTricks.com**. Founded in 1998, Guitar Tricks offers 11,000 standard video lessons, delivered by their staff of instructors. In addition to their database, a key benefit is that on request, you're able to book a private video lesson with an instructor, or a spot in a group session. The site, whose resources can also be accessed via its Android app, boasts a collection of 600-plus songs subdivided into categories including bluegrass, jazz, blues, metal, rock, surf, country, classical, and funk & soul. Each song comes with its own instructional video, and some come with their own scores.

One aspect unique to Guitar Tricks is the Core Learning System. Designed especially for beginning students and those returning to the guitar after a long break, the system allows you to structure a series of courses based on specifically what you choose to learn on the instrument. Like most all-in-one services, you also have access to tools including a scale finder, metronome, chord finder, and tuner, along with a few other customized exercise programs.

Guitar Tricks is one of many online databases; other popular sites include:

JamPlay offers 6,500 lessons from over 90 instructors, which include celebrity artists like Bumblefoot (Guns N' Roses), Steve Stevens (Billy Idol), and Mike Keneally (Steve Vai, Joe Satriani), as well as live video lessons in which site members can interact with the instructor.

Though they have fewer lessons to choose from, **ArtistWorks** offers instruction on a variety of instruments in addition to the guitar, from seasoned teachers including Paul Gilbert, Keith Wyatt, Tony Trischka, and classical guitarist Jason Vieaux. The site's best feature is its video exchange, in which students can submit videos of themselves playing, and receive instructor feedback based on their technique.

Guitarcast, an online subscription learning platform from Stringletter Media, the company that publishes *Acoustic Guitar* magazine, offers hundreds of instructional videos from master teachers at *AG*, Hal Leonard, Homespun, and others, and caters to acoustic and electric players of all levels and styles.

With the largest database online, **TrueFire** has 40,000 lessons with 140 plus instructors, including Muriel Anderson, Tommy Emmanuel, Laurence Juber, and Adam Levy.

An entirely free service, **JustinGuitar** offers over 1,000 lessons and appears on several "best online guitar resources" lists.

THE MULTI-TOOL EXPERIENCE

Outside of all-inclusive software programs and lesson databases, there are several incredibly useful apps that are available to the self-taught musician.

Offering a very basic yet timeless function is Roni Music's **Amazing Slow Downer**—which does just what it says: it slows down recorded music without affecting the pitch. It's available as software on both Macs and PCs, and now there's an ASD app for Android and Apple devices that can connect to tracks on Spotify (with a Spotify Premium account).

Available on Apple, PC, and Android devices, **EarMaster 7 Pro** includes 2,500 exercises for ear training and sight-singing, along with fundamental music theory and

rhythm study. The range of exercises is interactive and designed for all skill levels.

With a database of 2,000 songs, **FourChords** is an app for Android and Apple devices that breaks down songs into four simple guitar chords to make them easy to follow for beginners. It also includes lesson tutorials from JustinGuitar, as well as the ability to adjust the key and tempo, track progress, and get feedback via audio signal processing tech (the same used in Yousician).

Chordify is a unique app that uses audio signal processing in a different way: It analyzes an uploaded song (from anywhere online, or your own hard drive) and outputs a measure-by-measure chord chart. It then allows you to play back, edit, and transpose the results. It's available as an app for both Android and Apple devices.

You can find tablature and chord charts for nearly any song you're interested in learning with **Ultimate Guitar Tab**, **Songsterr**, and **GuitarTapp PRO**. **iReal Pro**, and **Guitar Jam Tracks** are three examples of play-along apps that provide you with the backing tracks you need to play along with the songs you're working on. There are a number of tuner apps available, but **Guitar Tuna** (from the makers of Yousician) is especially handy for its simplicity.

INSTRUCTOR FEEDBACK

A former New York City public school teacher, the aforementioned Dr. Powell also teaches at several universities in the NYC metropolitan area. (He assigns homework to his master's level education students, to whom he's teaching basic guitar for use in their own classrooms, on FourChords.)

"I think it's a really exciting time for people who want to learn guitar," he says. Especially in the realm of popular music education, Powell emphasizes the importance of applying your individual goals to your self-education. "Choosing the different resources that work for you, playing the songs that you want to play, and learning in the way you want to, is a better approach for engaging students to stay with playing the guitar throughout their lifespan.

"It starts with what you want to do. The people who are going to stick with learning a new instrument, whatever it is—it's based on attraction to their interest. Because, if you're really into it, when your fingers start hurting because you're playing guitar chords and you haven't built up calluses, that passion is what's going to keep you coming back."

Christopher Sampson—founding director of the popular music program and songwriting professor at USC Thornton School of Music—has had a multifaceted performing career on the guitar. He uses EarMaster Pro every morning as part of his daily routine. "It's my equivalent of going to the gym," he says.

"At the beginning level, I think these resources and these apps can be great entry points," he continues. "They can offer really good starting points to get somebody on fire and interested, and there's a lot to be said for that. Enthusiasm goes a long way." When choosing the right educational app or program, Sampson says, "It has to work very intuitively so that I'm not working harder at learning the software than I am at learning the skills that I need.

"Ultimately, all music is self-taught," Sampson adds. "For somebody to really achieve something interesting in music, they're going to have to take all the concepts they gather, whether that's via technology, influences, peers, and they're going to have to figure out how to create their own style and sound.

"They have to teach themselves what this means to them. That's a big step—but the self-initiative part of things, of students sparking their own learning process, is a great sign that they might be ready for that down the road." AG

LEARNING TOOLS YOU CAN USE

Amazing Slow Downer
ronimusic.com

ArtistWorks
artistworks.com

Chordify
chordify.net

EarMaster Pro
earmaster.com

FourChords
musopia.net/fourchords

Guitarcast
guitarcast.tv

Guitar Jam Tracks
ninebuzz.com/jam-tracks-app

Guitar Tapp PRO
microsoft.com/en-us/p/guitartapp-pro

GuitarTricks
guitartricks.com

Guitar Tuna
yousician.com/guitartuna

iReal Pro
irealpro.com

JamPlay
jamplay.com

JustinGuitar
justinguitar.com

Rocksmith
rocksmith.ubisoft.com

Songsterr
songsterr.com

TrueFire
truefire.com

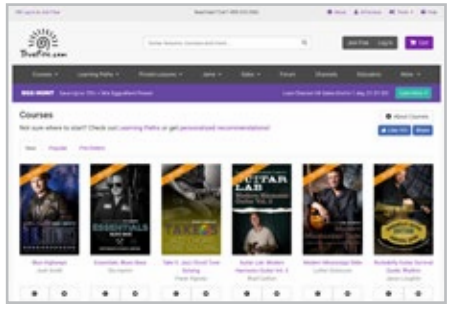
Ultimate Guitar Tab
ultimate-guitar.com

Yousician
yousician.com

Guitarcast



TrueFire



JustinGuitar



Amazing Slow Downer



EarMaster 7 Pro



Charted Territory

An introduction to reading lead sheets

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

How do you get a guitar player to turn down? Put a chart in front of him. This might be a tired old joke, but isn't there a bit of truth to it? Guitarists—amateurs and professionals alike—often rely solely on their ears or tablature to learn and share music. But in many real-world situations, like jazz-combo performances and session work, guitarists are presented with charts, also known as lead sheets, in which music is presented in skeletal form, with just melodies and chord symbols to work from.

Charts are not for the completely uninitiated—they require at least a fundamental knowledge of staff notation and fretboard harmony. If you have a solid foundation but want to learn more about reading charts and lead sheets, then this lesson, based on an actual lead sheet by the masterful modern guitarist and composer Mark Goldenberg, is for you.

LOOK AT THE BIG PICTURE

Just as you would in learning any piece of written music, start by identifying basic elements like the key signature and time signature—in this case, 4/4 and E minor—and the tempo and feel. This one's obviously a medium Latin number, with a metronome marking of 180 bpm. Be on the lookout for any changes in key and meter (there are none here), and flag them on the chart if you'd like.

Scrutinize the piece's overall architecture. This chart has a standard AABA song form—with a twist. The A section (the pickup measure plus bars 1–6 and the first or second ending) is the customary eight bars in length, while the bridge (bars 11–19) has an extra measure. Taking the time to identify structural elements in this way, and noting any potentially tricky areas, will go a long way toward preventing you from getting tripped up when reading a chart.

MAP OUT THE MELODY

This chart happens to be written for guitar, so it sounds an octave lower than written. If you're playing a melody not composed specifically for the instrument, or written in concert key, play it as if it were notated an octave higher. In other words, play the C right below the staff (middle C on piano) at string 2, fret 1, or any of its other locations on the fretboard, etc.

A useful—and at the same time tricky—characteristic of the fretboard is its repetition of notes. Before you read through a chart, it's a good idea to determine where on the fretboard you'd like to play it, and get a general sense of how you will finger the melody. Start by finding the lowest and highest notes in a chart. Then, look for not just one, but all possible fretboard locations for the melody—ideally ones that allow you to stay in position while adding harmonic embellishments and bass notes.

You could easily play "Ask the Fist" in the open position, with the first note, E, on string 4, fret 2, and the next two notes on the open G and B strings, etc. Among other possibilities you could also play it in second position (first finger on the second-fret E, fourth on the fifth-fret G, third on the fourth-fret B, etc.) or seventh position (first finger on the seventh-fret E, fourth on the tenth-fret G, third on the ninth-fret B, etc.). The choice is yours—use whatever position feels most comfortable under your fingers and also has the appropriate timbre.



JOEY LUSTERMAN

Mark Goldenberg

Also, note that lead sheets generally indicate melodies in their most basic form, with plenty of leeway. It's expected that the performer will dress up the tune with ornaments like grace notes and other melodic embellishments. (Visit AcousticGuitar.com for video of Goldenberg playing with his trio to see how he interprets his melody.)

SNIFF OUT THE CHORDS

To be an expert chart reader, it's important to have a wide variety of chord types and voicings at your disposal—you should automatically know where to place your fingers on the fretboard in order to play, say, a C9 (#11) chord. (Hint: Try X-3-2-3-3-2 or 8-X-8-7-7-X for just two possibilities.) But you should also consider what's right for the context. If you're playing with a bassist, for example, as Goldenberg does in his trio, you needn't play six-note chords all the way through. That could in fact muddy up the sonic spectrum. So in this instance, it would be best to play lean voicings, like the open top three strings for an E minor chord, to stay out of the bassist's way.

If you're reading a chart for a session or performance with another harmonic instrument, like a second guitar or piano, you might coordinate chords in advance, so that there's no clashing or cluttering going on. In a twin-guitar situation, for instance, one player might do voicings higher on the neck and the other player lower, or one player might run a bass line on the low strings, while the other adds compact voicings above. Just a little advance preparation will go a long way here.

KNOW HOW TO READ MAPS
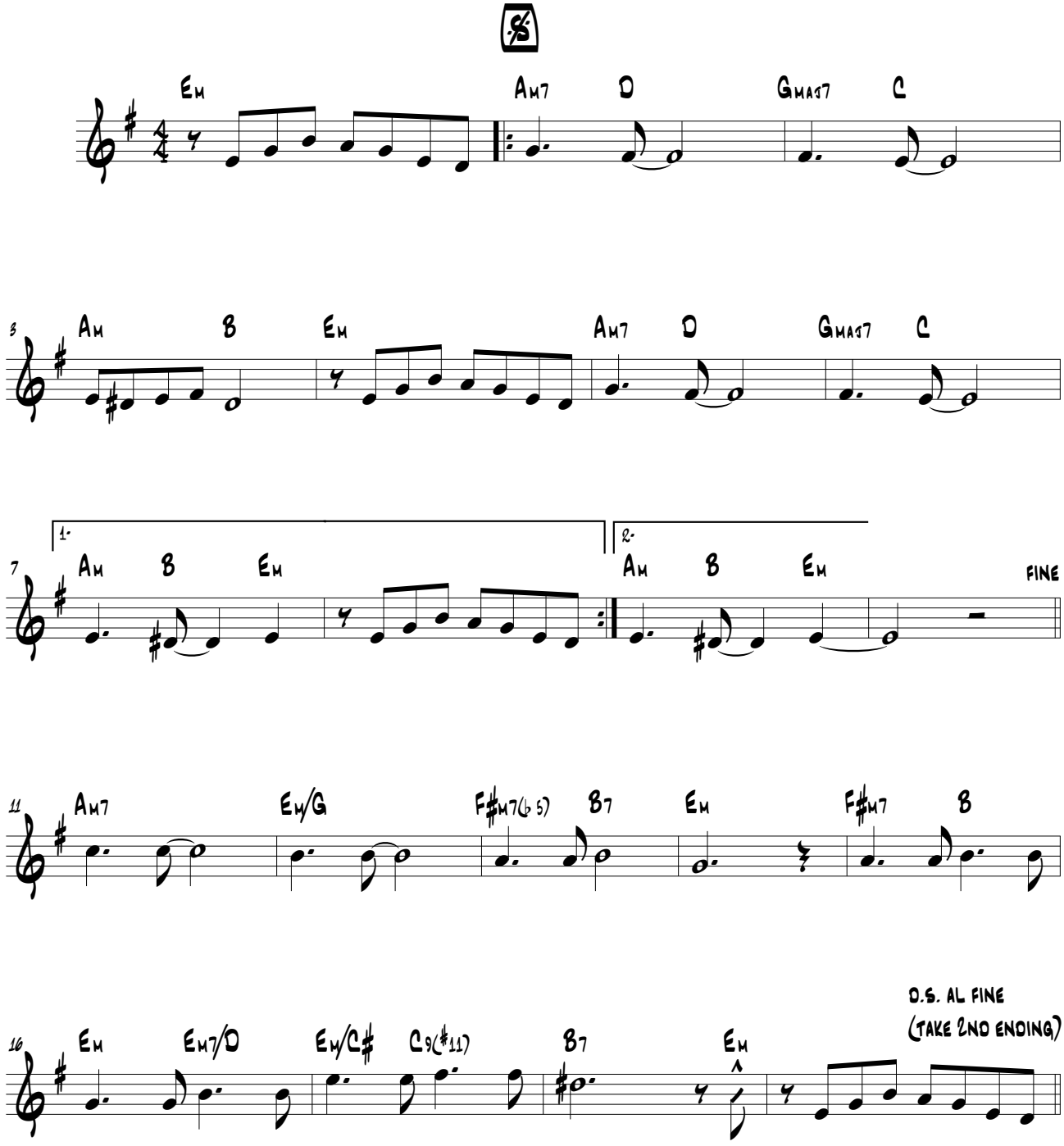
Like a lot of the notation you see in this magazine, charts often use repeats and other symbols to save space and avoid inconvenient page turns. It's important to understand how these indications work—and to be on top of them during performance. Here's what to do for this particular chart: As indicated by the forward repeat at the beginning of the first full bar, play the music through the first ending, then, as directed by the backwards repeat at the end of bar 8, go back to the forward repeat. Keep playing, this time skipping the first ending and proceeding to the second ending (bar 9). Continue until you see the indication *D.S. al Fine (take 2nd ending)* at the end of bar 19. That directs you to the sign (above the first full measure), where, as before, you'll skip over the first ending and go to the second. The tune ends at bar 10, where you see the indication *Fine*.

As with all things in music, learning to read charts will take a bit of time and practice to master, and the more you know about different styles, plus the more you work with other musicians, the better you'll get. So get out there and play! AG

Ask The Fist

MED. LATIN ♩ = 180

MARK GOLDENBERG



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Fred Sokolow



COURTESY OF FRED SOKOLOW

The Almighty Blues Box

How to make the minor pentatonic scale work in almost any situation

BY FRED SOKOLOW

THE PROBLEM

You know the minor pentatonic, the basic scale used in blues-rock riffs and soloing, but it only works on bluesy tunes—it clashes with those with major-scale melodies.

THE SOLUTION

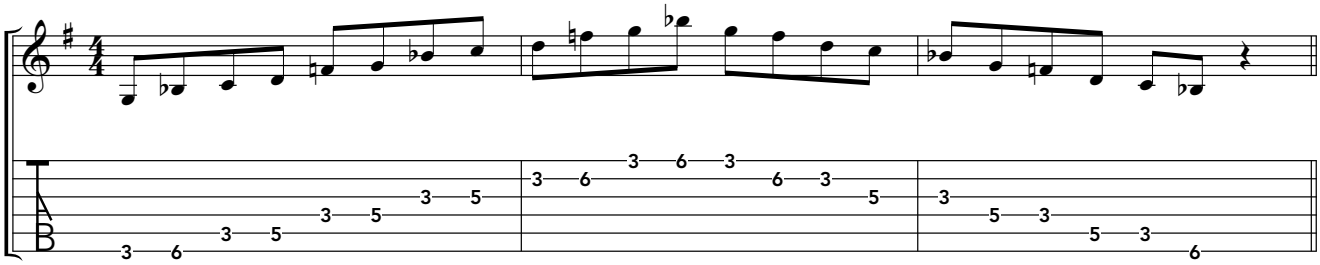
Learn how to effectively use the exact same scale on those non-bluesy tunes.

One of the first things that most guitar players learn—after a handful of chords—is the minor pentatonic scale, aka the blues box. It's a five-note scale that's highly useful for blues, rock, and other styles in that it allows you to easily play credible solos—even if at first you don't really know what you're doing. This might be a simplification of what blues legends like Buddy Guy, Eric Clapton, B. B. King, and T-Bone Walker actually do, but it works! While these guitarists are primarily known for their electric work, Clapton with his *MTV Unplugged* era notwithstanding, the minor pentatonic is of course an equally essential scale for acoustic guitarists. In this lesson I'll get you up to speed on the scale and how to use it in context—a little sample of what I teach in my recent video *Jamming the Blues for Electric and Acoustic Guitar* (Stefan Grossman's Guitar Workshop).

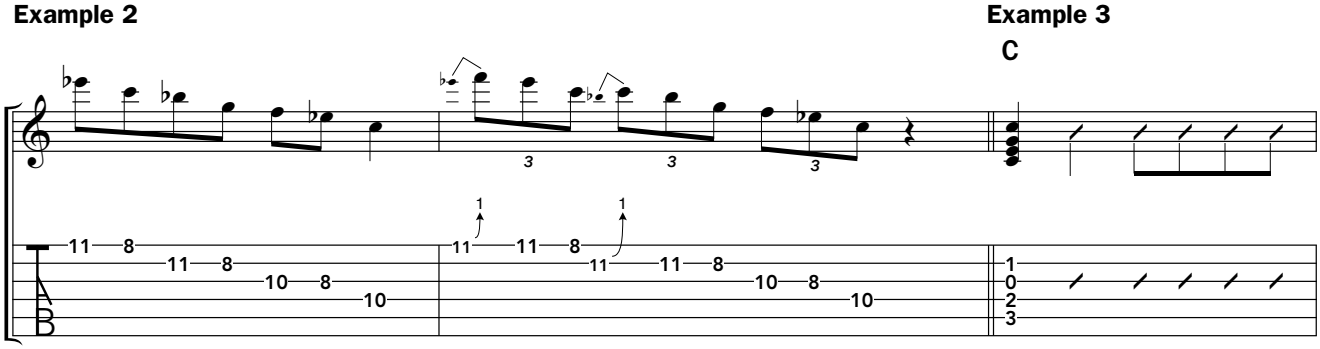
1 GET THE BOX UNDER YOUR FINGERS

Start by playing the blues box in G, or the G minor pentatonic scale (G B♭ C D F), as shown in **Example 1**. Use your first, third, and fourth fingers to stop the third-, fifth-, and sixth-fret notes, respectively. You can play the scale in any key by moving the box up or down; place the box in the right key by fretting the root note on string 1 with your first finger. For instance, to play the A minor pentatonic scale (A C D E G), just shift everything up two frets, as string 1, fret 5 is an A; going down two frets from G minor pentatonic gets you F minor pentatonic (F A♭ B♭ C E♭). For a good workout,

Example 1

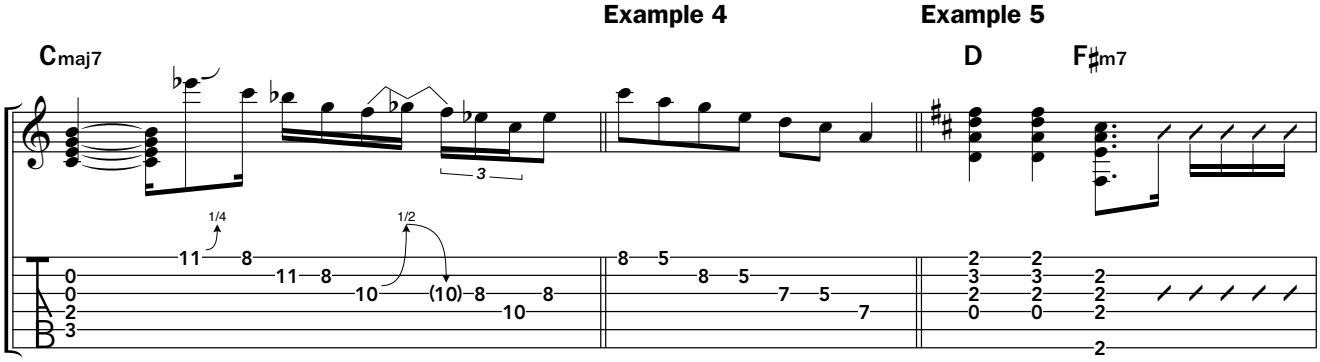


Example 2



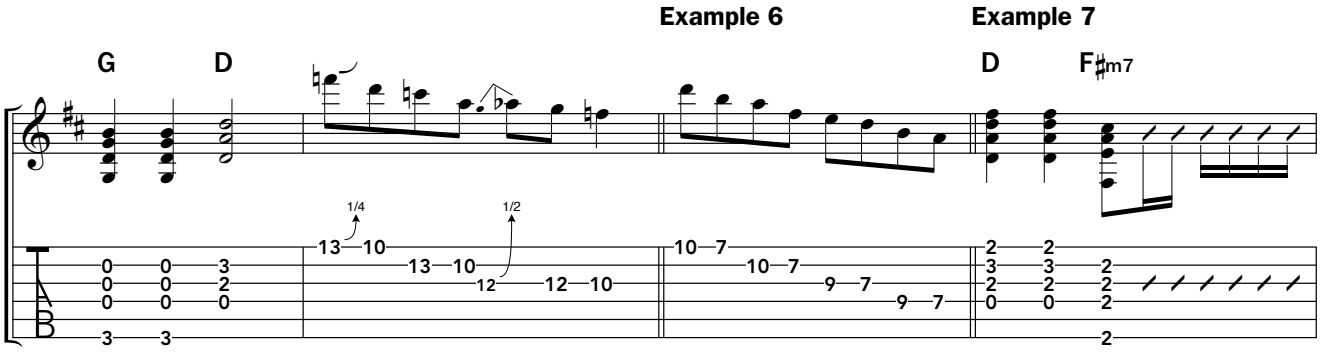
Example 3

Example 4

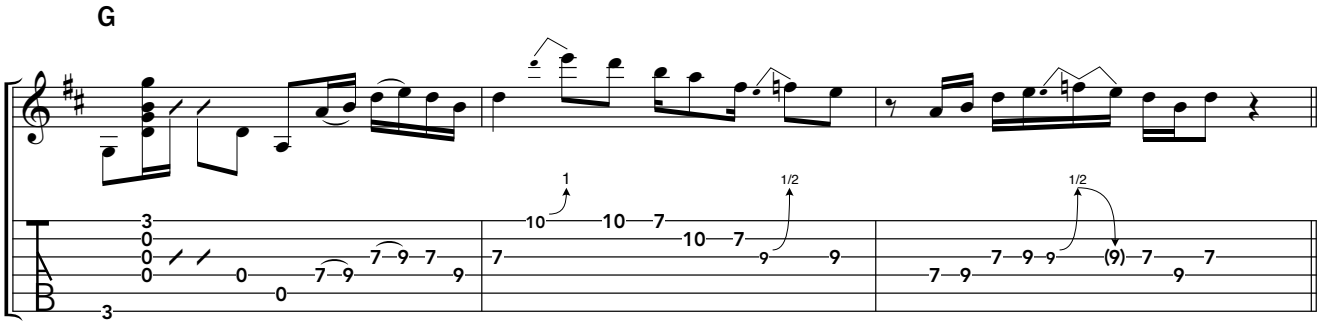


Example 5

Example 6



Example 7



try playing the blues box in different keys, both ascending and descending.

2 TRY IT IN CONTEXT

Generally speaking, you can use the same minor pentatonic scale to solo on either a major- or minor-key tune. But the trouble is, the blues box doesn't neatly work on every kind of tune. Let's say you have a song—whether it's blues, country, or rock—in the key of C major, with a melody containing lots of blue notes (put simply, the flatted third and seventh, or E♭ and B♭ in the key of C). The C minor pentatonic scale (C E♭ F G B♭) will in fact work in this context, because the song contains those blue notes. Play the blues box at the eighth fret, and even on the acoustic guitar, you can bend some of the strings for a bluesy effect (**Example 2**).

But what if I'm playing a tune in C, based on the C major scale (C D E F G A B)? If I jam using the blues box over that song, it's going to sound wrong. For instance, imagine playing blues licks from C minor pentatonic over the chord progression to "Something," by the Beatles (**Example 3**). It's not happening. The way to make the blues box work in an instance like that—a major-key song without blue notes—is to move it down a minor third, or three frets. Use the blues box shown in **Example 4**, and it will sound a whole lot better.

Let me give you another example in the key of D. If I were to play something like Van Morrison's "Tupelo Honey" and wanted to add some bluesy fills, I might try playing a blues box at the tenth fret, as in the last measure of **Example 5**. But, as you can hear, that sounds inappropriate. So take it down three frets to access the B minor pentatonic scale (B D E F♯A), as in **Example 6**, and you're golden. As before, you can add some cool bends (**Example 7**).

3 UNDERSTAND HOW IT WORKS

It might be helpful to understand why the three-fret trick works. It's kind of complicated if you don't yet know music theory, but bear with me: Every major key or scale has a relative minor. C major (C D E F G A B), for instance, shares the same notes as A minor (A B C D E F G); D major (D E F♯ G A B C♯) is equivalent to B minor (B C♯ D E F♯ G A). On the fretboard, you can take the first note of any major scale and go down three frets (again, a minor third) to find its relative minor. For another example, if you play an A major scale (A B C♯ D E F♯ G♯) starting on string 6, fret 5, the note three frets below, F♯, is the first note of the F♯ natural minor scale (F♯ G♯ A B C♯ D E).

Take a song like "Tupelo," which has a melody that's drawn from the D major scale (D E F♯ G A B C♯). In Ex. 5, I played some fills using the D minor pentatonic scale (D F G A C). The reason that didn't sound so hot is because the notes F and C clash with the song. So when I switched to the B minor pentatonic scale—in other words, the relative minor of D major—it worked much better, as the notes are all in the song's key and scale.

That's almost understandable, isn't it? If not, just remember: When you want to play a bluesy solo, find a song's root note on the first string and build your blues box there. You know the shape. If it sucks, just take it down three frets and it will work. I hope that this tip will allow you not to just play bluesy solos but to actually use that versatile minor pentatonic scale/blues box in almost any situation.

Fred Sokolow, a Los Angeles–area multi-instrumentalist, is the author of hundreds of instructional books and videos for guitar, banjo, mandolin, lap steel, and ukulele. sokolowmusic.com



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Mimi Fox



BILL EVANS

America the Beautiful

A jazz arrangement of the patriotic classic

BY MIMI FOX

The simple yet evocative melody of "America the Beautiful" has always moved me. When I was preparing to record my most recent album, *This Bird Still Flies* (Origin Records), I wanted to come up with an arrangement of "America" that would be fresh and personal while retaining the original song's beauty and simplicity. As an arranger and improviser, there were many routes I could have taken, but I chose to keep the tempo relatively slow and stately, so that the melody would really stand out. And while there are a few tricky passages, I stayed pretty close to the fundamental harmony, so it shouldn't be too hard to play. I hope you will enjoy learning my interpretation of "America" as much as I enjoyed arranging it.

THE HARMONIC LANGUAGE

When I interpret a tune, I always try to honor the composer's intent first and foremost. In order to do this effectively, I must have a strong connection to the music and then apply my knowledge to the piece. In other words, I let the emotions I feel serve as my inspiration and then approach it with whatever ideas seem most appropriate.

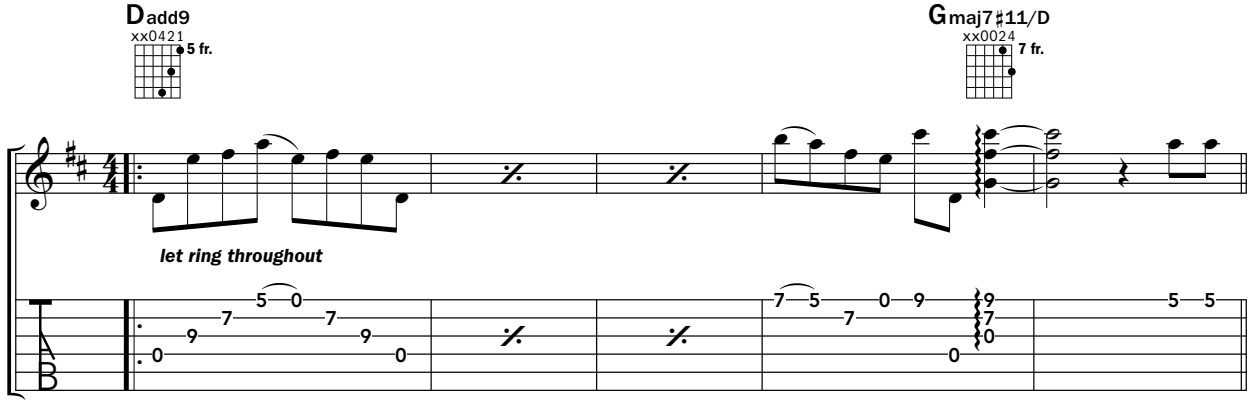
For "America," I decided not to superimpose too much complex harmony on a relatively simple melody. But I did adjust the original chords slightly, as shown in this transcription, which is based on my original studio recording. For instance, in the intro (bars 1–4) and throughout, in place of a plain D triad I play a Dadd9 chord. It's a bit of a stretchy voicing—I play it with my first, second, and fourth fingers on strings 1, 2, and 3, respectively, atop the open D string—but it's worth it for the hint of color it adds.

That Dadd9, by the way, is a very useful voicing in that it's moveable. Be sure to play around with the shape. You can shift it up to the seventh fret for Eadd9/D (or an E9 chord with the seventh, D, in the bass), to the eighth fret for Fadd9/D, to the tenth for Gadd9/D, and so on. Also, if you take the Dadd9 shape and lower your second finger by one fret (half step), you transform the grip into a m(add9) chord—the type of voicing the great jazz pianist Bill Evans made frequent use of.

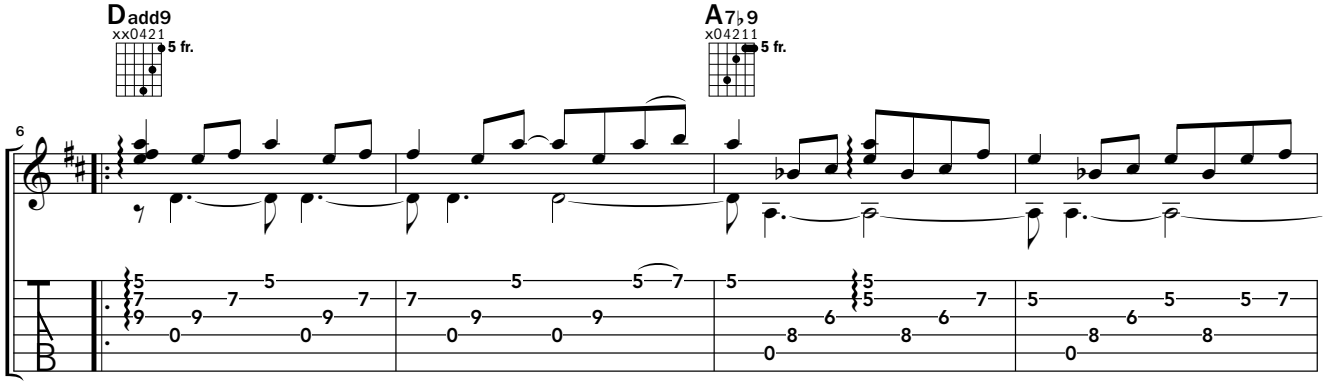
Another key part of this arrangement is the frequent use of pedal tones. (Briefly, a pedal tone is a note, commonly in the bass, that remains constant while the chords above it change.) I use pedal tones a lot when playing solo guitar, like on versions of the jazz standards "Caravan" and "On Green Dolphin Street" from my 2006 album, *Perpetually Hip* (Favored Nations). Pedal tones are also commonplace in classical guitar literature—like what I think of as an inverted pedal, in the Heitor Villa-Lobos piece "Prelude No. 1," where an E minor chord stays constant while the bass notes shift below it. In any case, you can find lots of open D and A pedal tones in my arrangement of "America." As you can hear, these tones create harmonic fullness and greatly enrich the sonic experience.

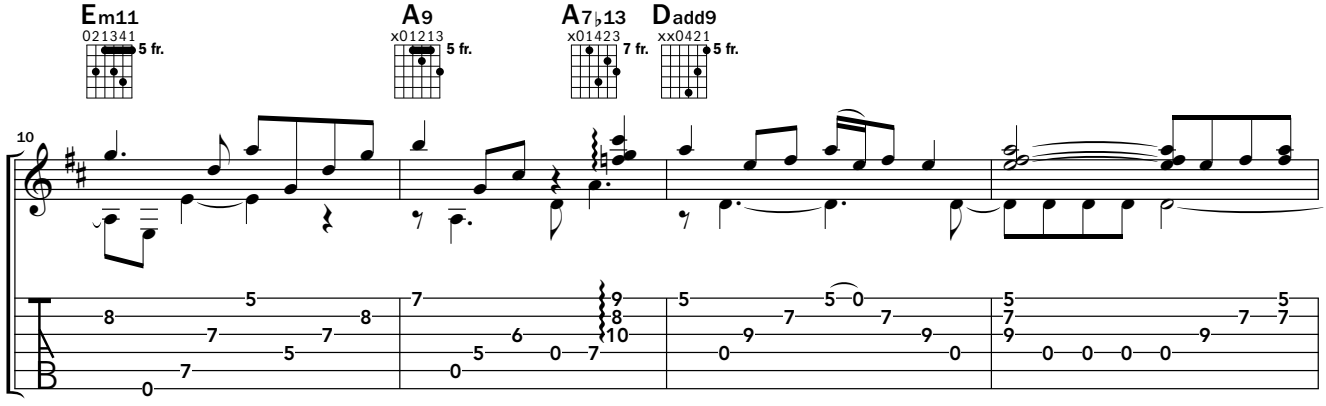
Measures 18 and 19 feature parallel harmony—which is when a single chord type is moved in different intervals. In this case I have

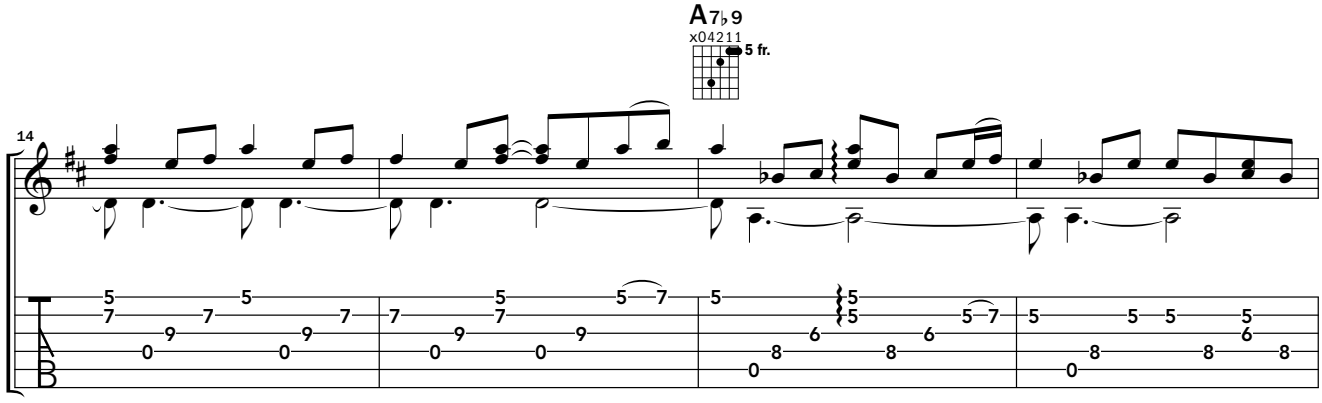
Moderately Slow and Stately



with improvised variations on repeat







Cont. on p. 46

This Arrangement © 2019 Mimi Fox

taken a basic major triad and moved it from B to C to D with a B pedal. This is a haunting effect that creates a bit of tension in an otherwise fairly consonant passage. You'll notice that I play the D/B (which can also be seen as Bm7) with natural harmonics, which strengthens and reinforces the haunting effect while providing textural variety.

In measure 25–27, I use two different harmonic devices to render the melody. First, I play an A7♭9 chord voicing at the fifth fret and then move the same shape down to the second fret (the second half of bar 26). This can also be seen as a series of diminished seventh shapes moved in minor thirds—a common jazz move for negotiating an altered dominant chord like A7.

In measure 27, in order to accommodate the melody of the song—and for a modern flourish—I harmonize using major seconds. An open-A string pedal throughout makes for a seamless transition between the A7♭9 voicings and the seconds.

Finally, in measures 37 and 40, note that, for extra melodic color, I use the D Lydian mode (D E F♯ G♯ A B C♯), rather than the D major scale (D E F♯ G A B C♯). D Lydian is identical to D major, except that D Lydian has a raised fourth (G♯). That one note makes a big difference in mood!

TECHNICAL AND IMPROVISATIONAL ASPECTS

As with learning anything new, when tackling this arrangement, take it slowly and work on getting a beautiful tone in both hands. Some of the chord voicings may be new to you, so you'll need time to get your ears—and fingers!—accustomed. When I am learning a new piece, I like to play just a few measures at a time to really work on playing a passage cleanly and with strong emotion.
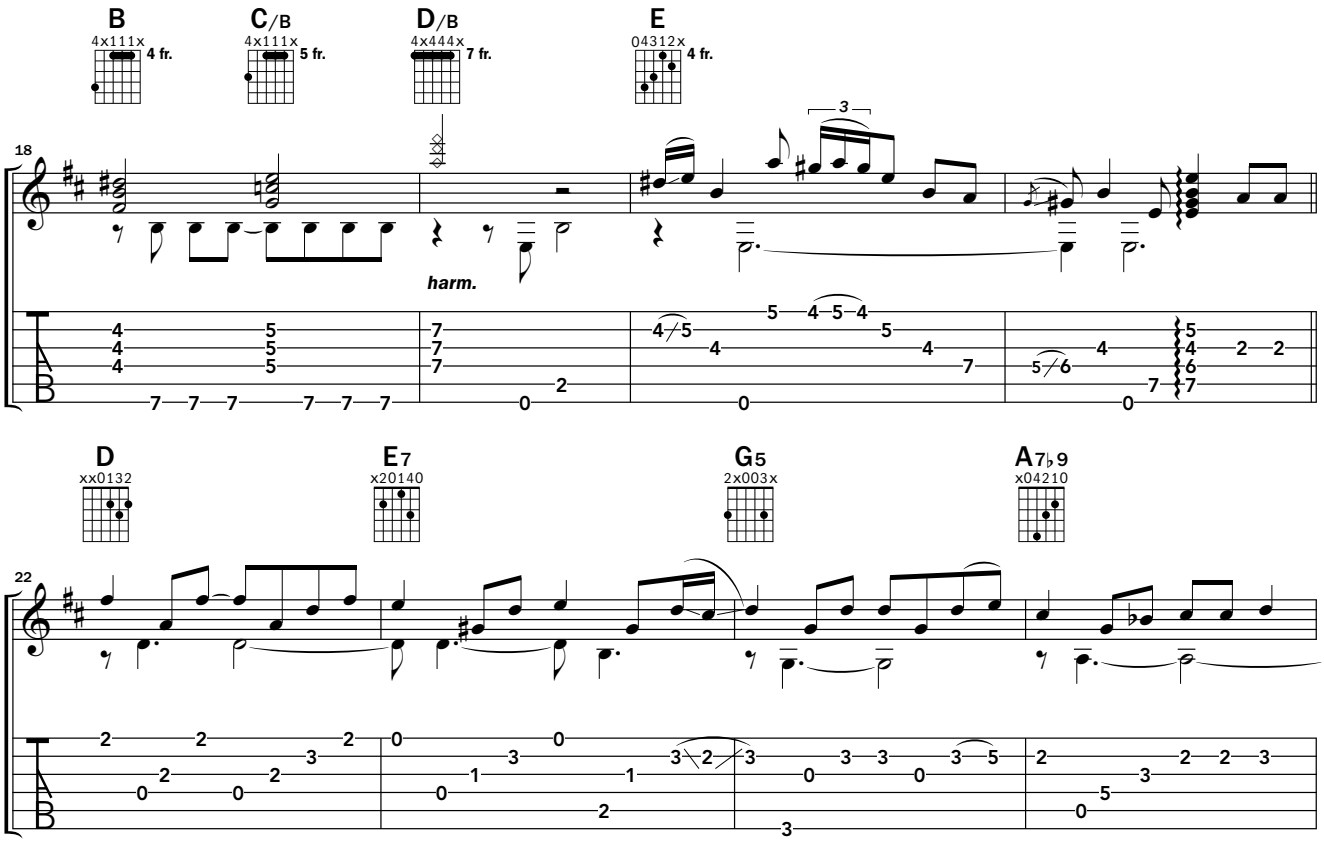
Many students ask me about my picking-hand technique. I prefer a hybrid approach, using a pick and my middle and ring fingers for additional notes. However, this arrangement also lends itself to fingerstyle play. It's a good idea to experiment with picking approaches because they will reveal different qualities of both the guitar and your musicality. Switching up techniques is also a good way to avoid repetitive-stress injury.
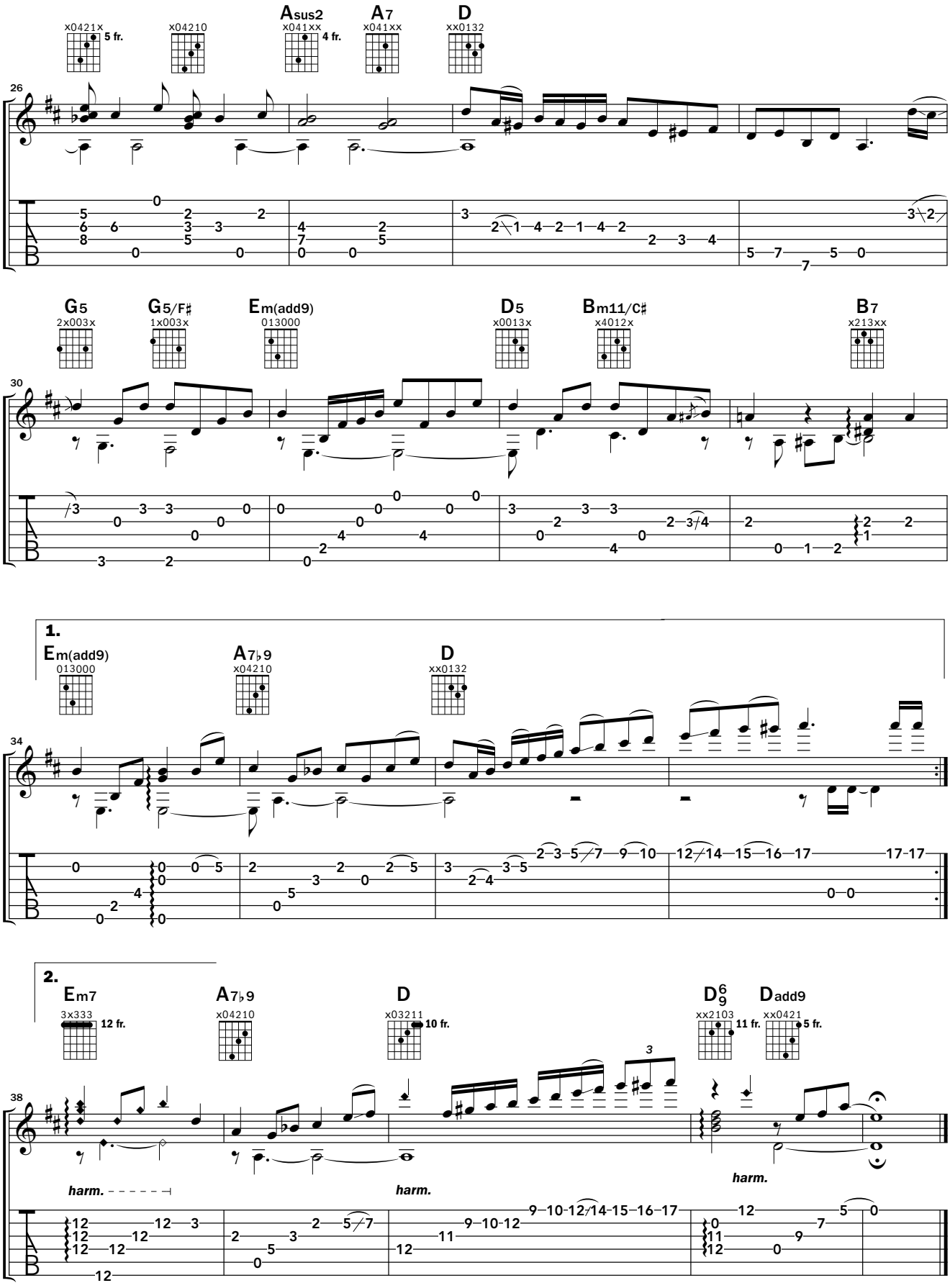
Another thing that students often ask is if there's a trick to get a piece to really come alive. The truth is that there is no trick at all. Just let your life experience and your humanity guide you. And, though this is an instrumental arrangement, keep in mind the song's beautiful lyrics as you play it. (Google the lyrics if you don't know them.) For example, "amber waves of grain" is vivid imagery. I might choose to play the music that corresponds with that particular phrase (measures 10–11) with vibrato to really bring it to the forefront.

When I arranged "America," I chose some pretty fixed harmonies but naturally left plenty of room for improvisation. You can hear this by comparing the first and second passes through the form on my studio recording, or by comparing that album version with the video I filmed for this lesson. If you're new to improv, you might find it too intimidating, so you have my blessings to play my arrangement exactly as written. However, I want to encourage you to try playing a few things off the cuff, even if minimally. In measures 36, 37, and 40, use your own D major or D Lydian lines instead of mine, and do the same wherever else you feel inspired to do so.

Mimi Fox is a guitarist, composer, and educator/clinician based in the San Francisco Bay Area. She has performed with Branford Marsalis, Abbey Lincoln, and Joey DeFrancesco, among other prominent jazz musicians. mimifoxguitar.com

Cont. from p. 45




x0421x
5 fr.
x04210
Asus2
x041xx
4 fr.
A7
x041xx
D
xx0132
26
G5
2x003x
G5/F♯
1x003x
Em(add9)
013000
D5
x0013x
Bm11/C♯
x4012x
B7
x213xx
30
1.
Em(add9)
013000
A7♭9
x04210
D
xx0132
34
2.
Em7
3x333
12 fr.
A7♭9
x04210
D
x03211
10 fr.
D6/9
xx2103
11 fr.
Dadd9
xx0421
5 fr.
38
harm.
harm.
harm.

Be sure to try a variety of different slides to see what works best for you.



HUGH O' CONNOR

Slide Rules

How to play bottleneck guitar in a range of styles

BY PETE MADSEN

Slide/bottleneck guitar can evoke flavors ethereal and lyrical or aggressive and bombastic. From Santo & Johnny's "Sleepwalk" to Elmore James' "Dust My Broom" (see transcription on page 58) and on to Debashish Bhattacharya's Indian slide musings (see feature on page 30), this approach delivers a wide spectrum of sounds, emotions, and cultural touchstones. In this Weekly Workout, you'll look at styles ranging from blues and rock to Hawaiian and Middle Eastern sounds, which should whet your appetite for digging into bottleneck slide.

But first, if you're just getting into bottleneck, you might want to gather an assortment of slides to see what works best for you. Slides, most commonly made of steel, brass, glass, and ceramic, come in varying lengths. For single-string slide playing, a smaller—and therefore less cumbersome—slide might suit you, but if you want to play full chords in an open tuning, make sure the slide covers the width of your fretboard. On the acoustic guitar, I prefer a bottleneck with some weight, since more mass equals more sound.

WEEK ONE

Many blues and rock guitarists play slide in both standard and open tunings, so standard tuning is a good place to start. If you're not already familiar with the E minor pentatonic scale, check out **Example 1**, the basis of your first group of exercises.

For **Example 2**, in which the E minor pentatonic scale is played along string 1, place the slide on either your third or fourth finger (I tend to use the latter.) The goal here is to smoothly slide from a half step below each

Beginners' Tip #1

In addition to contacting the string with your slide, rest your first finger lightly on the string behind the slide to damp the strings. Also, keep your thumb squarely situated on the back of the guitar's neck for stability.

target note. Keep your slide low, just covering the first string and slightly angled away from the neck. For proper intonation, make sure to target the fretwire instead of playing between the frets, as you would in standard fretting.

In **Example 3**, you'll navigate a couple of longer slides. Remember to keep your fretting-hand thumb on the back of the neck as you slide your entire hand along string 1. **Example 4** transfers the E minor pentatonic scale to the second string. Try angling the slide slightly inwards to play this phrase. It's okay to make contact with the first string, since on the acoustic, string noise is not nearly as bad as it would be if you were playing an electric guitar through a hi-gain amp.

Now try a typical blues lick that moves between strings 1 and 4 (**Example 5**). As you move from string to string, keep your damping finger (see **Beginners Tip #1**) in place while you remove the slide and place it back down on the next string; this will silence the previous note when you move to the next. One drawback of slide playing is that when you move from string to string there can be a sloppy slurring of notes and overtones, but you can minimize this with careful technique and damping.

Playing single-string lines using pentatonic scales works well in standard tuning, but what about playing chords? In standard tuning, you can't place the slide over all the strings to form, say, a basic major chord. You can, however, imply chords using double stops. In **Example 6**, a I–IV–V progression in the key of E major (E–A–B) is suggested by root-third dyads at frets 9 (E), 2 (A), and 4 (B). Meanwhile, the seventh-fret dyad contains an E9 chord's flatted seventh (D) and ninth (F♯).

Close out this week with **Example 7**, a single-note lick that etches out a V–IV–I (B–A–E) progression in E. The B and A chords are simple dyads (root and third), while the E chord in second measure flirts with the ninth.

WEEK TWO

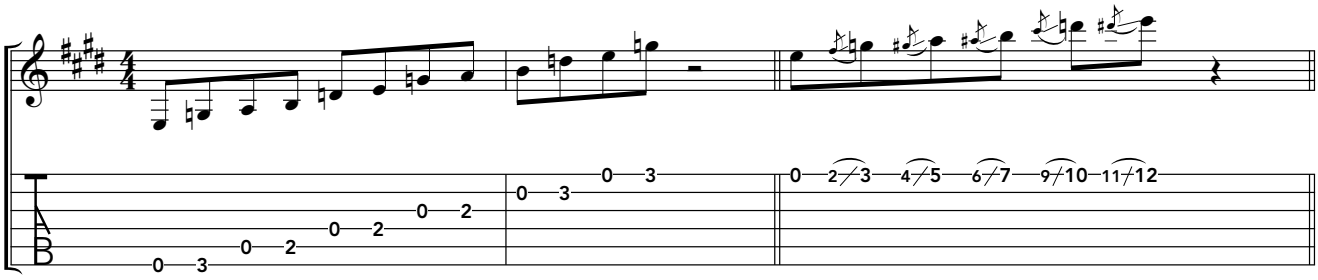
One of the main benefits of playing slide in an open tuning is the ability to play full six-string chords with the slide covering all the strings. This week you'll explore this concept in open D (aka Vestapol), a common tuning used by Duane Allman, John Fahey, and

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WEEK 1

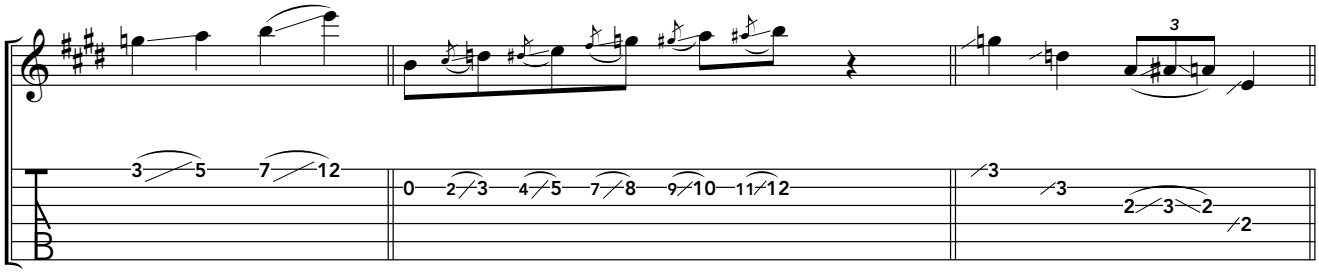
Week 1
Standard Tuning

Example 1



Example 2

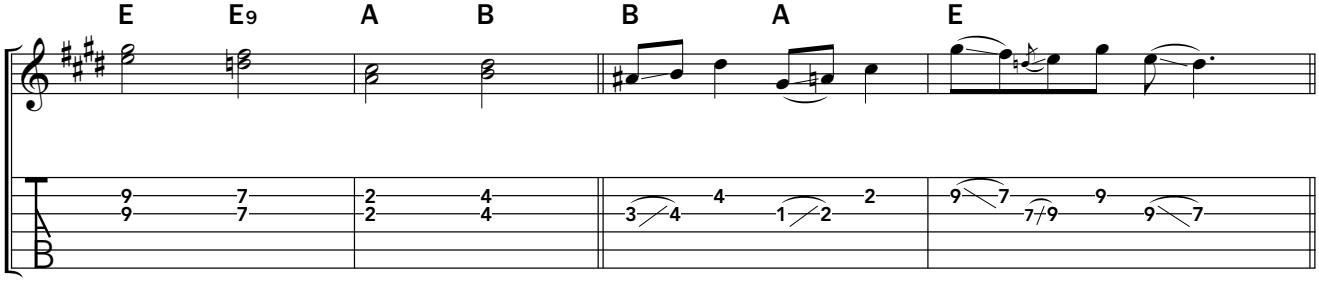
Example 3



Example 4

Example 5

Example 6



Example 7

Tampa Red, among many others. To get into Vestapol from standard, lower strings 1 and 6 a whole step, to D; string 2 a whole step, to A; and string 3 a half step, to F♯.

Example 8 shows I, IV, and V (D, G, and A) chords in D major that can be played either with a barred finger or the slide placed over all the strings. (No slide or finger is needed to play a D chord on the open strings.) Vestapol and other open tunings are perfect for multi-string licks. In **Example 9** you'll play a "Dust My Broom"–style lick, employing a triplet-based phrase played on the three high strings. For phrases like this, attitude and rhythmic drive are more important than finesse. The triplets can be played with all downstrokes or a combination of down/up strokes, as shown between the staves. Make sure to emphasize the first eighth note of each triplet.

On an open-tuned guitar, there's nothing quite like that haunting sound of an open string ringing underneath a slide phrase. **Example 10** is a Ry Cooder–approved lick reminiscent of "Paris, Texas." Make sure the open sixth-string D sustains when you play this phrase.

Blues fingerpickers often play alternating bass patterns in open D by simply using the open sixth and fourth strings for the D chord. This idea is explored in **Example 11a**, which features a simple slide melody on string 1, played atop a common thumbpicked bass line. Keep your slide low, just covering the first string, so that it doesn't interfere with the other strings.

Beginners' Tip #2

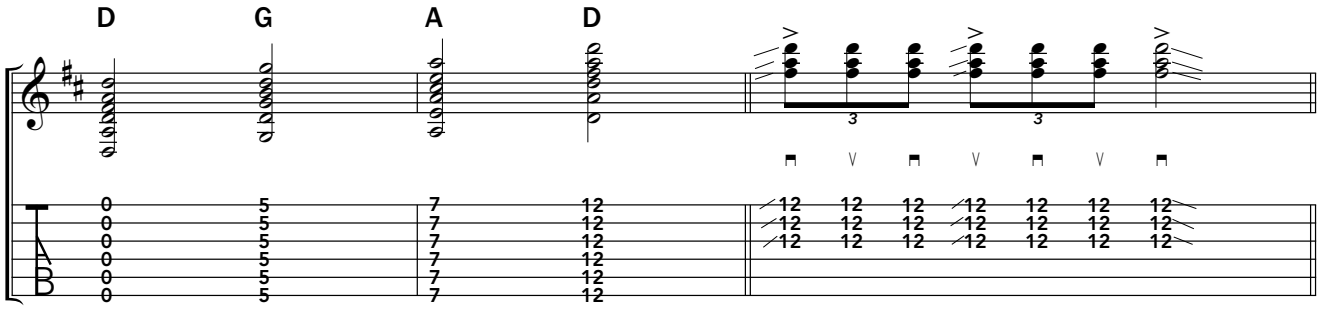
Rest the slide on the string, but don't push down. The goal is to let the slide glide on the string: too much pressure and you will hear a segmented sound; not enough contact and you will hear the sizzle of the slide coming off the string.

WEEK 2

Week 2

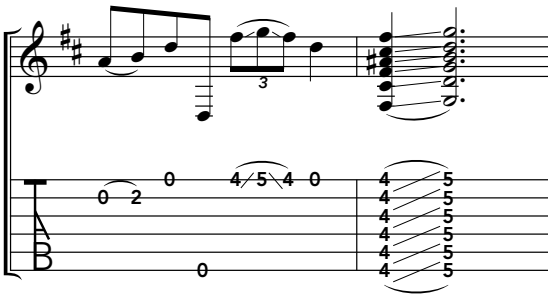
Tuning: D A D F♯ A D

Example 8

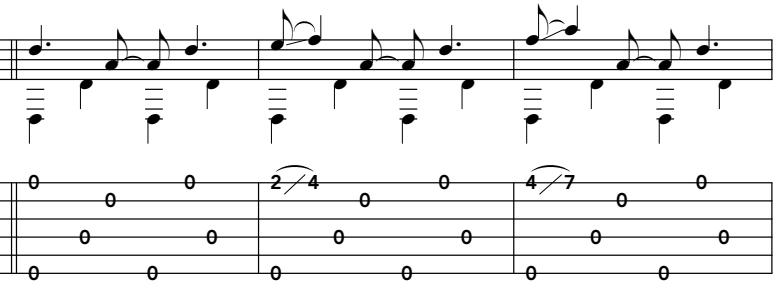


Example 9

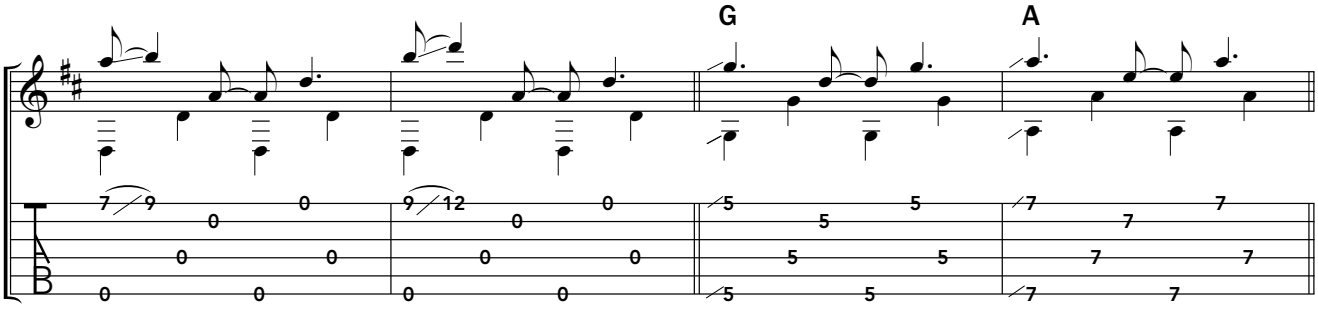
Example 10



Example 11a



Example 11b



Example 11b transfers the basic pattern to the fifth and seventh frets, for the IV (G) and V (A) chords, with the slide covering all six strings.

WEEK THREE

Another popular tuning for blues and rock players is open G (a.k.a. Spanish tuning), used extensively by guitarists like Charley Patton, Robert Johnson, and Jimmy Page. From standard tuning, lower strings 1 and 6 down a whole step, to D, and string 5 down a step, to G.

Many of the applications of slide in open D can be transferred to open G, including alternating bass, licks played on multiple strings, and the use of open strings. **Example 12**, inspired by the licks Jimmy Page played in Led Zeppelin's "In My Time of Dying," places slide licks above a G pedal tone, all on string 3.

Beginners' Tip #3

When placing the slide over all the strings, make sure to align it with the fretwire. If your slide slants inside of the fret, you will sound out of tune.

For a bigger sound, you can play parallel licks on strings of the same notes, as shown in **Example 13**, an octave-based line on strings 5 and 3, which are both pitched at G. On your own, try a similar approach with a line played at parallel frets on strings 1, 4, and 6, all tuned to D.

The 1959 Santo & Johnny hit "Sleepwalk" employed some wonderful lap-steel playing, which you can emulate with the bottleneck. For a facsimile of that tune's opening lick (**Example 14**), begin by playing a 12th-fret harmonic on string 1, then place slide behind the nut, and in one continuous motion, pass through frets 2, 4, and 9, without picking. It might take some practice to pull off this maneuver, but it's a crowd-pleaser every time!

As you progress deeper into this lesson, the emphasis will be on playing multiple notes with a single attack, in the manner of players like Santo Farina (of Santo & Johnny) and Debashish Bhattacharya. **Example 15** is similar to the main melody of "Sleepwalk." In bar 2, pick only the first-fret C and sound the other notes by sliding into them. Make sure that your bottleneck maintains contact with the string and that you make an audible stop at each note before progressing. Do the same with each group of three notes in **Example 16** while striving for a smooth and clear sound.

WEEK FOUR

Now that you've worked with some open tunings and gotten comfortable with your slide technique, try some more unusual sounds in D7—a new tuning that's like open D, but with string 2 tuned to C. First, play a Middle Eastern-sounding scale (1 ♭2 3 4 5 ♭6 ♭7), as depicted in **Example 17**.

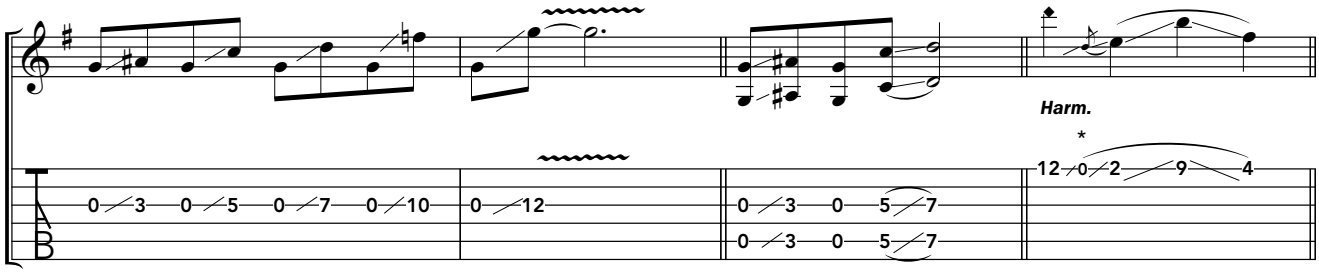
From time to time, I bounce the slide on the first string, as shown in **Example 18**, for an interesting effect. This technique requires

Beginners' Tip #4

A good-sounding vibrato requires that you slide into the note(s), then retract, pulling the slide back towards the nut and then returning to the precise note(s). Try not to go sharp of the note, which will produce a rubber-band-like sound.

WEEK 3

Week 3
Tuning: D G D G B D
Example 12

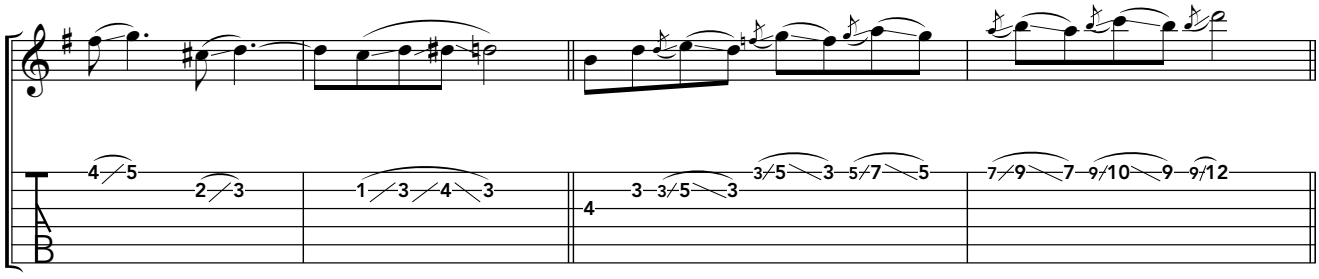


Example 13

Example 14

***Start slide behind nut.**

Example 15



Example 16

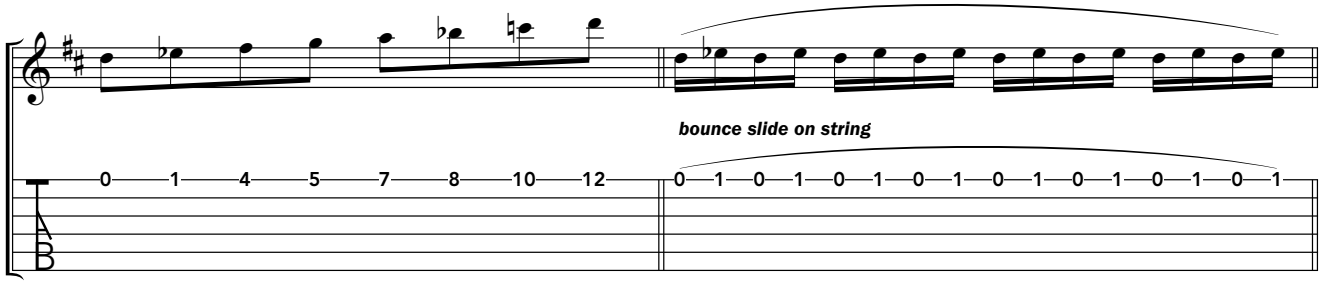
you to wiggle your entire hand—you're going for a buzzing, fly-like sound. In **Example 19**, you'll play an Indian-style phrase based on the same scale presented in Ex. 17, once again with multiple slides on each picked note, along with some vibrato from the slide. **Example 20** builds on bars 2 and 3 of Ex. 19 by adding notes on string 2 for a very cool-sounding riff harmonized in major seconds.

If you've played through the exercises in this lesson, you can see that slide guitar has a wide range. As you move forward in your studies, experiment. Don't be limited by a genre or specific tuning. Think of slide as a voice unto itself that has shades of light and dark, boldness and delicateness, fullness and sparseness. AG

WEEK 4

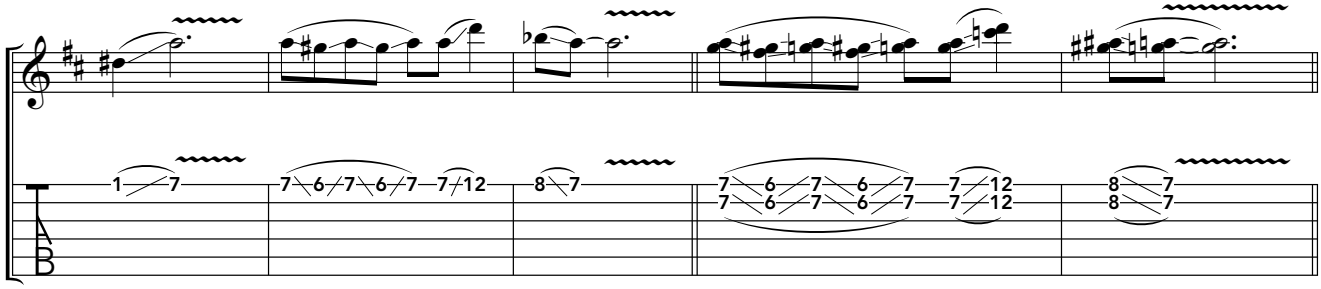
Tuning: D A D F♯ C D

Example 17



Example 18

Example 19

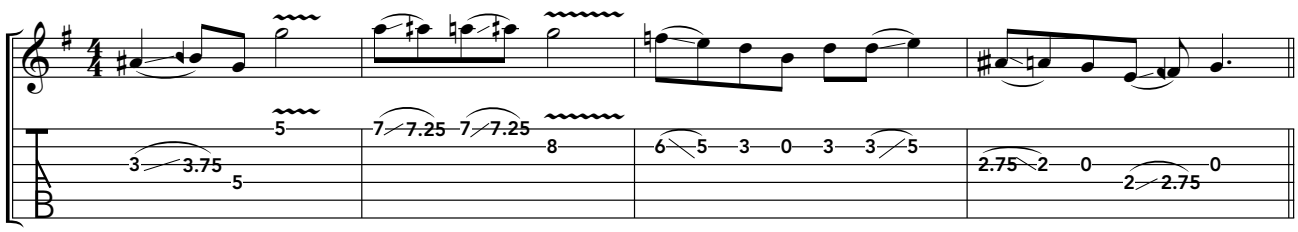


Example 20

TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Since slide guitar allows you to make microtonal adjustments, the next step would be to play notes in between the frets. Ry Cooder does this with wonderful dramatic tension in tunes like "The Dark End of the Street." In bar 1, the B is a quarter-step flat (sounding just below B); in bar 2, the A is a quarter-step sharp (just above A); and in bar 4, the A is three quarter-steps sharp (just below B). Use your ear as much as your eye to navigate these slightly sharp and flat notes. The sound is unresolved until you play the note after the sharp or flat. In the first measure, for instance, you never quite reach B, but when you play the subsequent G note, the resolution is that much more gratifying.

Tuning: D G D G B D




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RICHARD THOMPSON PLAYS "SHE TWISTS THE KNIFE AGAIN" LIVE IN BROOKLYN IN 1992
acousticguitar.com/tag/july-august-2019

Richard and Linda Thompson, 1981



PAUL L. KOVIT

She Twists the Knife Again

Richard Thompson's revelatory solo arrangement of one of his classic songs

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

As *AG* contributing writer Mac Randall observes in his Richard Thompson lesson feature on page 20, the British guitarist sounds explosive when playing the electric guitar. Throughout his long career, Thompson has managed to harness that same high energy on the steel-string, as is perhaps best witnessed on a recent series of all-acoustic recordings featuring new arrangements of several dozen old songs.
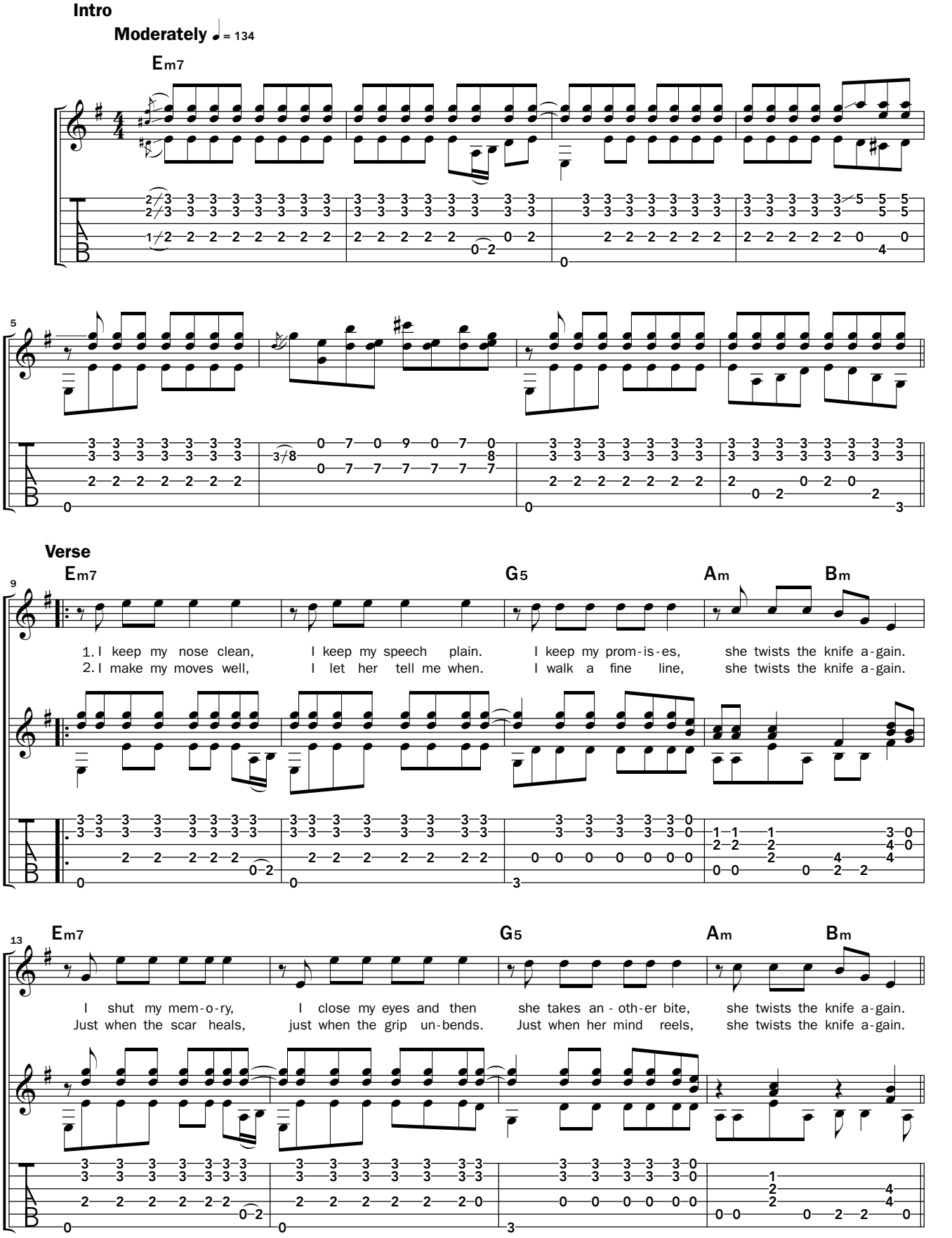
The transcription here, which captures "She Twists the Knife Again" note for note, comes from *Acoustic Classics II* (2017). Thompson first released the song with a full band on his third solo album, 1985's *Across a Crowded Room,* and has often revisited it in concert. The 1992 solo acoustic version linked to on *AG*'s website offers a glimpse of how Thompson's songs tend to morph in performance.

In terms of lyrical content, "She Twists the Knife Again" deals with an angry lover, and a persecuted one at that. Correspondingly, there's quite a bit of tension in his guitar parts, both in the picking-hand attack and choice of notes. As he customarily does, Thompson uses hybrid picking—a pick and fingers. This technique is especially effective here, as it allows for an agitated, contrapuntal sound that would be more difficult to achieve with other picking approaches.

The heart of the song is based on one long Em7 (E G B D) chord, which Thompson negotiates with a moving bass line against static chordal accents. To play this part, which first appears in the intro and continues into the verse, keep your third and fourth fingers anchored on strings 2 and 1, respectively, at the third fret. That way you can add the bass notes at the second fret with your first finger. Look out for the temporary position shifts in bars 4 and 6. Be careful not to let those moments disrupt the rhythmic flow. And, as a general rule of thumb, pick the notes on the lower strings with a pick and those on the higher strings with your middle and ring fingers; go for a kind of jittery feeling, which will suit the song.

Thompson's guitar solo here might only be eight bars long, but it's dense with athletic activity and requires solid technique in both hands. It's one of those solos that's perhaps best to begin learning at a ridiculously slow tempo so you can cleanly articulate all of the slurs (hammer-ons, pull-offs, and slides) and rhythmic embellishments.
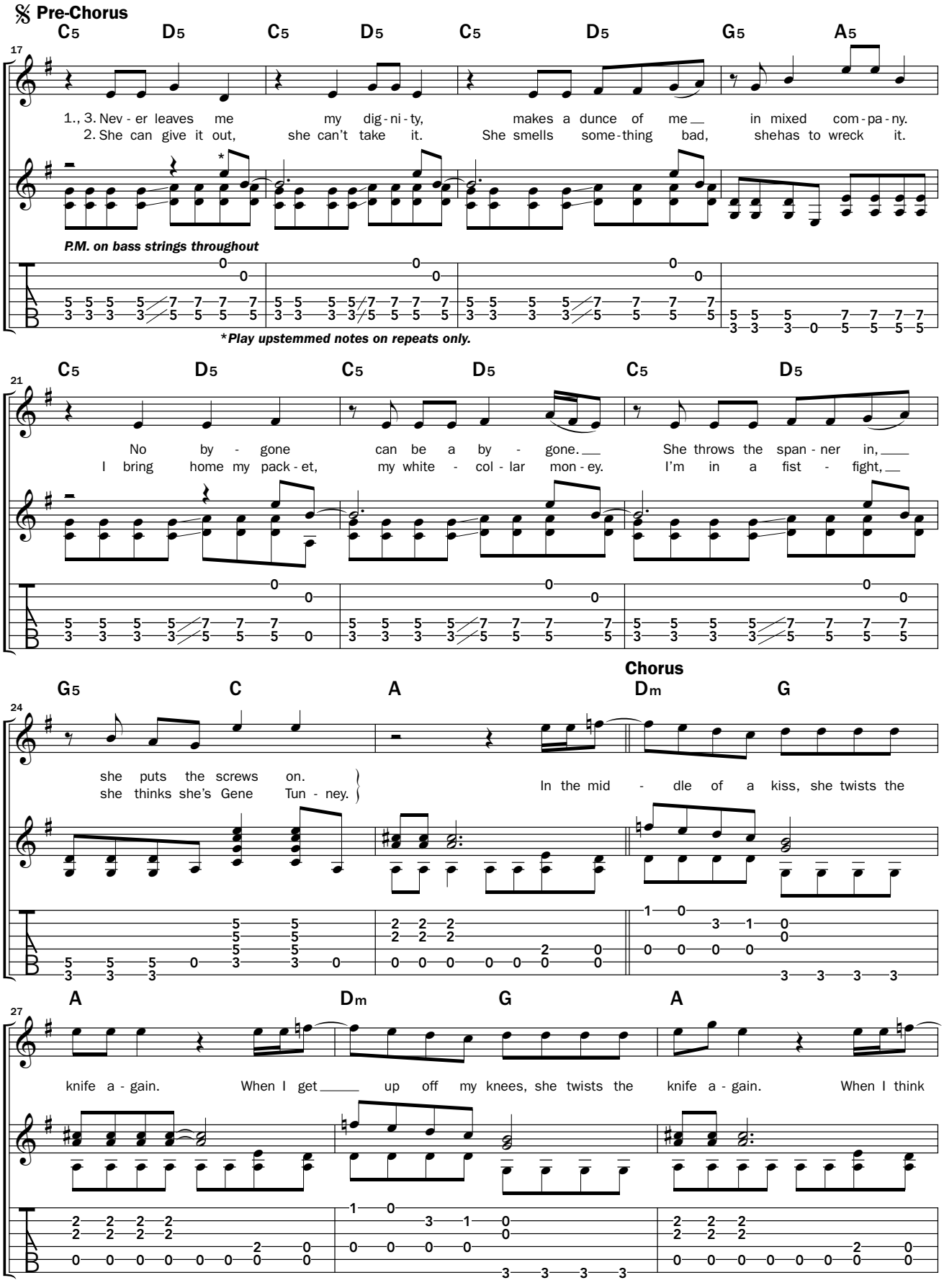
If you compare any two versions of "She Twists the Knife Again," you can get a sense of the extent that improvisation features into Thompson's guitar work. And so, once you've learned the piece, it would be a good idea to commit a few of his ideas to memory—a personal favorite is the angular line, harmonized in sevenths, that seems to appear from out of nowhere in bar 36. Combine those ideas with some of your own, whether spontaneous or precomposed, for a fresh rendition of "She Twists the Knife Again." AG
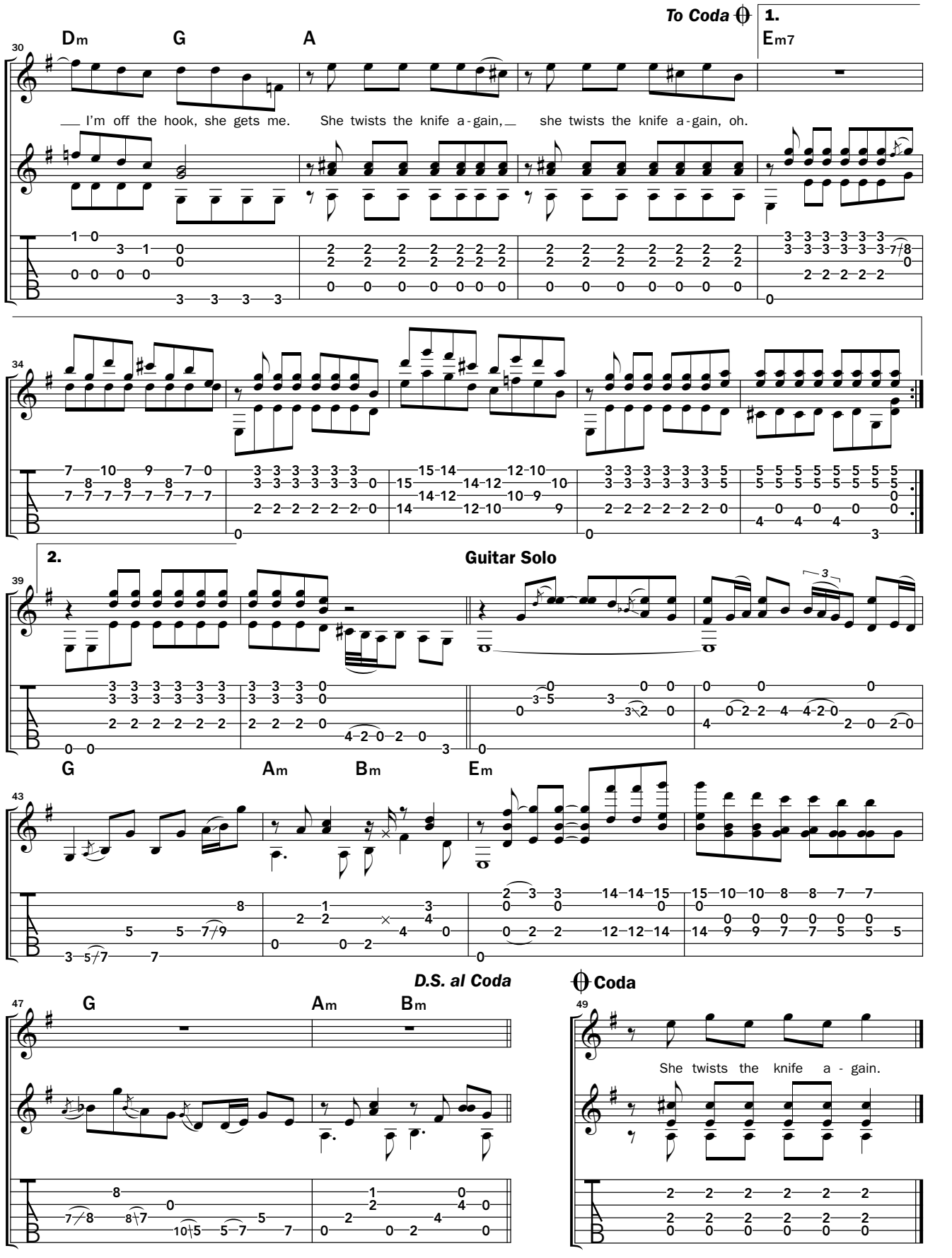


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Cont. on p. 56

Cont. from p. 55




To Coda
1.
Dm
G
A
Em7
30
I'm off the hook, she gets me.
She twists the knife a-gain,
she twists the knife a-gain, oh.
34
2.
Guitar Solo
39
G
Am
Bm
Em
43
D.S. al Coda
Coda
47
G
Am
Bm
49
She twists the knife a - gain.

CHECK OUT RARE FOOTAGE OF HOWLIN' WOLF PLAYING "DUST MY BROOM" LIVE IN 1966
acousticguitar.com/tag/july-august-2019

READERS' PICK

Elmore James made "Dust My Broom" into a blues standard.



I Believe I'll Dust My Broom

Two versions of a hugely influential blues classic, in two different open tunings

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

Between 1936 and '37, bluesman Robert Johnson recorded 29 songs, unknowingly casting the mold for blues and rock guitar for decades to come. A good case in point is Johnson's "I Believe I'll Dust My Broom" (1936), with its boogie and insistent triplet moves, which guitarist Elmore James later made into a blues standard. James' 1951 electric slide version in turn inspired the powerhouse blues-rock band ZZ Top and countless others.

The notation here includes transcriptions of both the original Johnson and James versions. Johnson made frequent use of nonstandard tunings, and his recording is in what's often labeled as Aadd9 tuning (low to high: E B E A C♯ E). To get there from standard, raise strings 2–5 a whole step each. (If you would prefer not to put the added tension on your guitar's neck, you can simply tune strings 1 and 6 down by a whole step instead.

Johnson's version is based loosely on a 12-bar blues in E. I say loosely, because in this unaccompanied setting the guitarist takes liberties with the form—for instance, subtracting two beats in bar 3 and adding one in measure 10. While I've notated just the first verse, note that in subsequent verses, there's much improvisation in the details, so in learning the song, go more for the overall spirit than a note-for-note reading.

The piece is somewhat demanding of the fretting hand, with stretches as great as six frets. If you have smaller hands or if you find certain parts painful or impossible to play, you can easily find workarounds. For example, beginning in bar 7, you can sacrifice the fifth-position dyads in the bass and play the open A string instead. Whatever fingering you choose, don't forget to shuffle the eighth notes—play them long-short, rather than evenly as written—and use a bit of palm muting (lightly rest your picking hand's palm on the strings as you play) for a crisp rhythmic effect.

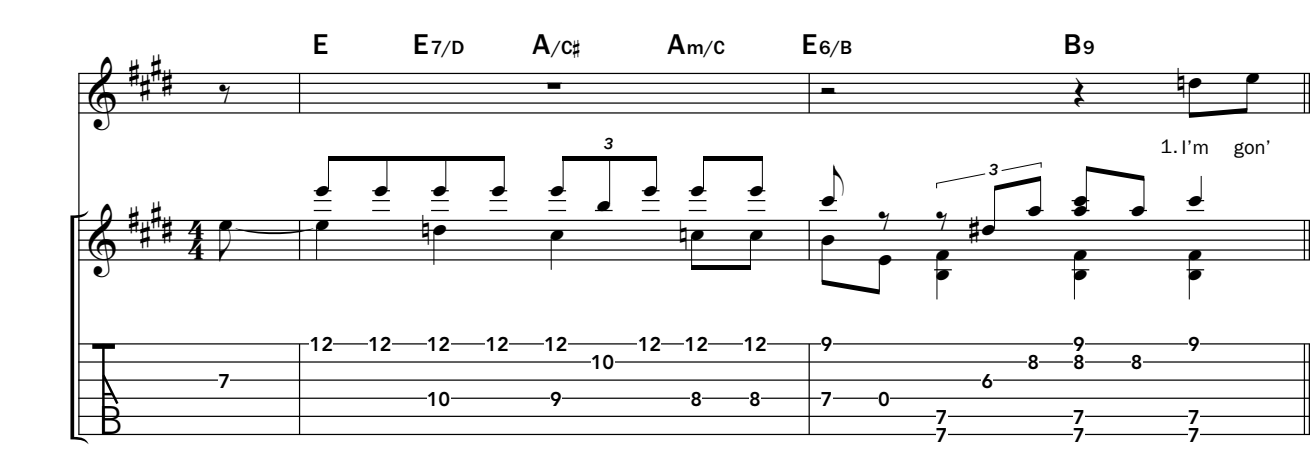
James' 1951 version is truncated not just in name ("Dust My Broom") but in form, four verses compared to Johnson's six. It's also in an entirely different tuning, open D. To get into D from standard, lower strings 1, 2, and 6 down a whole step, to D, A, and D, respectively, and string 3 down a half step, to F♯. Though James recorded "Dust My Broom" on electric, it's a great arrangement for a dobro, or really any kind of acoustic guitar—as long as the action will allow for a decent slide tone. (For a lesson on using the slide in different contexts, see Pete Madsen's Weekly Workout on page 48.)

James' opening slide part is one of the most recognizable and imitated riffs in blues and rock. It's quite repetitive, so once you've got it down, you'll have learned much of the song. Start by playing those eighth-note triplets—that's three evenly spaced notes on each beat—all in downstrokes. On beat 4 of bar 1 and elsewhere, you'll need to dart quickly between the C on string 1, fret 10 and the A on string 2, fret 12. Pay close attention to your intonation—target the notes directly above the fretwire, rather than between frets, as with conventional fretting-hand technique—but remember that capturing that almighty triplet groove is what's most important here. AG

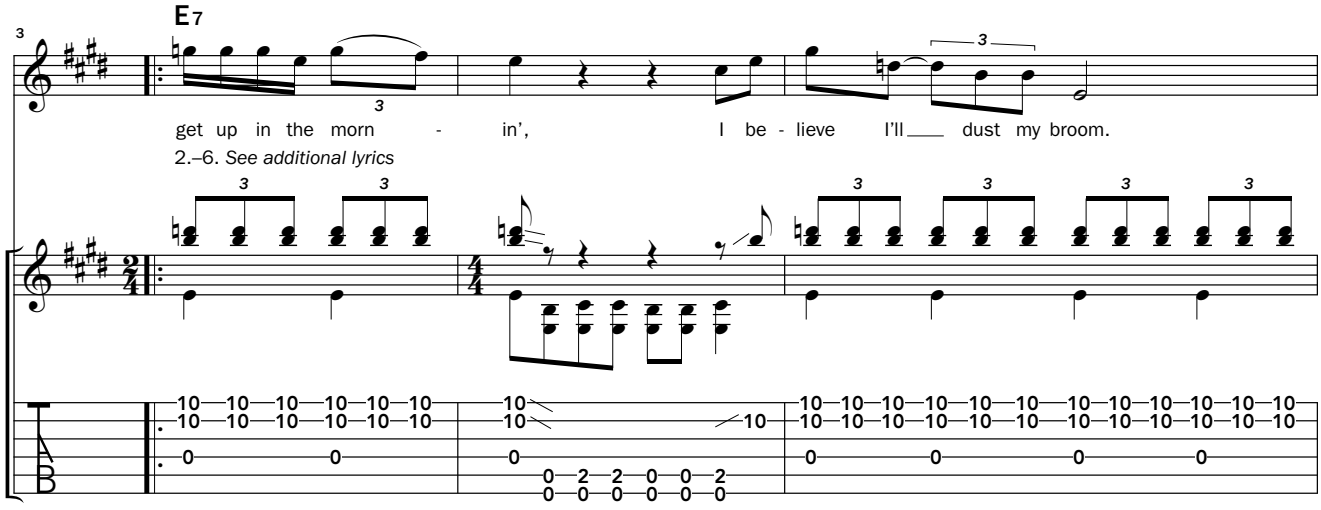
Original Robert Johnson Version

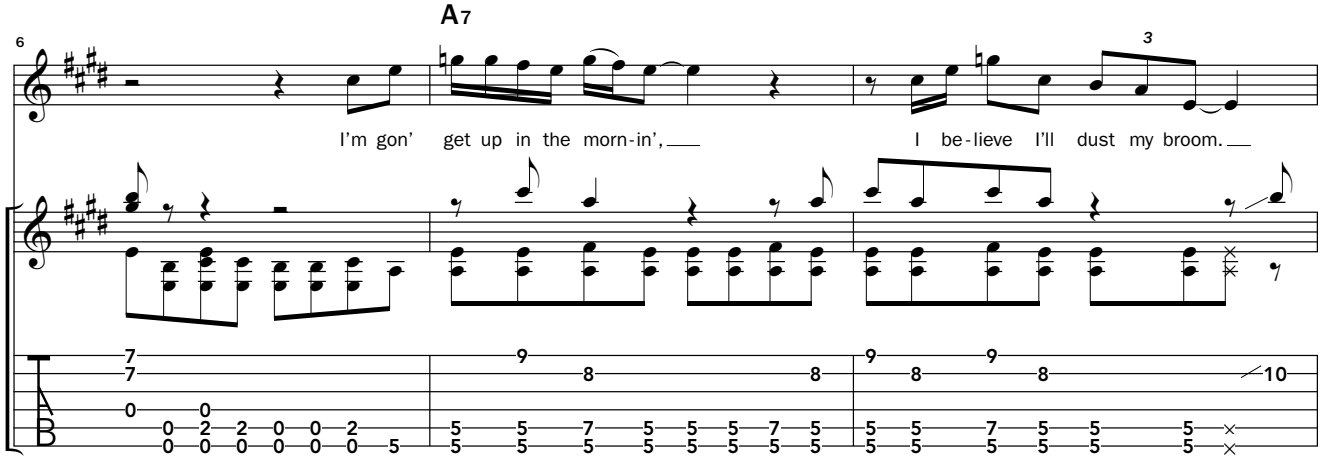
Tuning: E B E A C♯ E

Intro



Verse
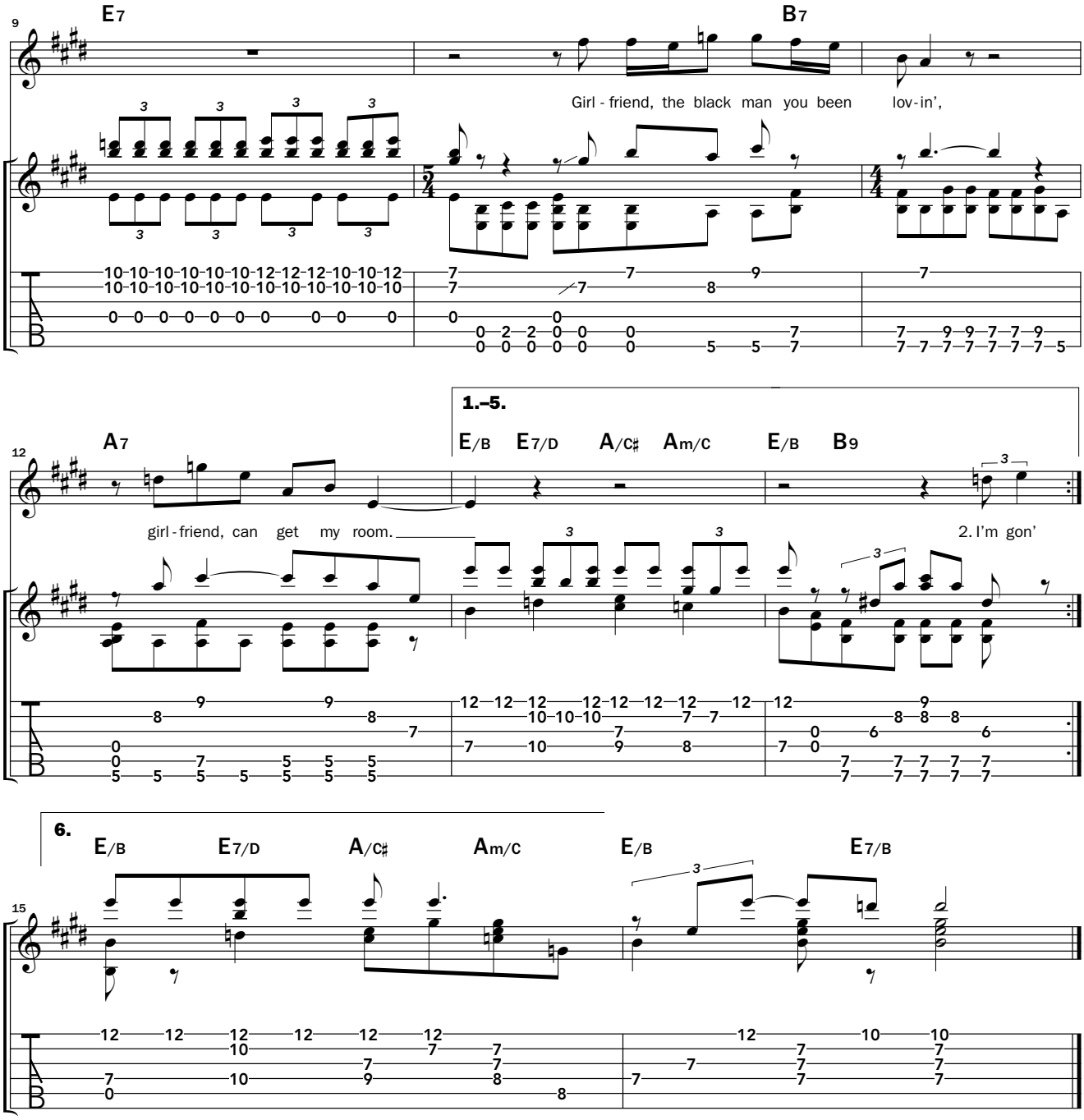




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Cont. on p. 60

Cont. from p. 59



2. I'm gon' write a letter
Telephone every town I know
I'm gon' write a letter
Telephone every town I know
If I can't find her in West Helena
She must be in East Monroe, I know

3. I don't want no woman
Wants every downtown man she meet
I don't want no woman
Wants every downtown man she meet
She's a no good doney
They shouldn't allow her on the street
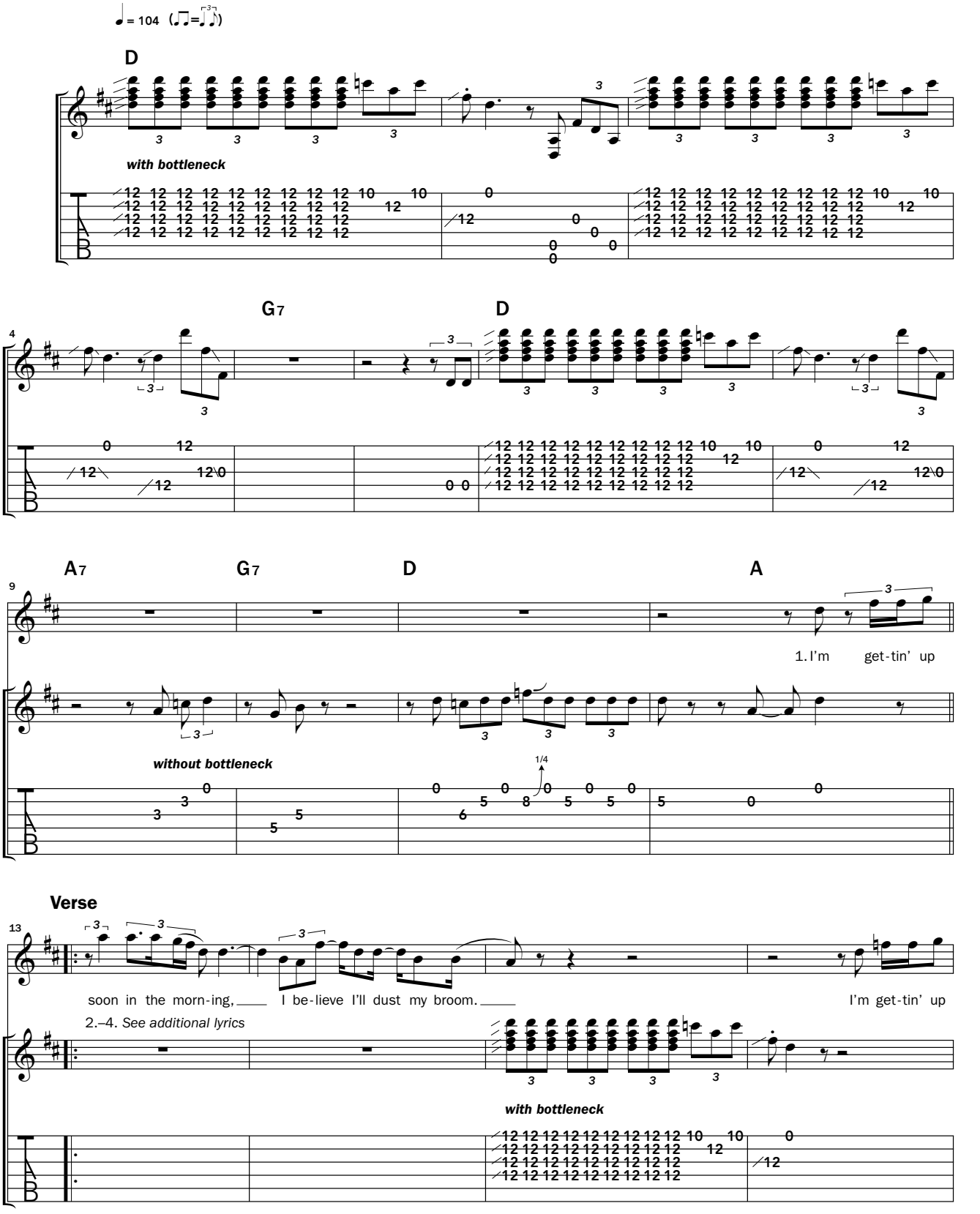
4. I believe, I believe I'll go back home
I believe, I believe I'll go back home
You can mistreat me here, babe
But you can't when I'm back home

5. And I'm gettin up in the mornin'
I believe I'll dust my broom
I'm gettin up in the mornin'
I believe I'll dust my broom
Girlfriend, the black man you been lovin'
Girlfriend can get my room

6. I'm gonna call up Chiney
See is my good girl over there
I'm gonna call up China
See is my good girl over there
I can't find her on Philippines Island
She must be in Ethiopia somewhere
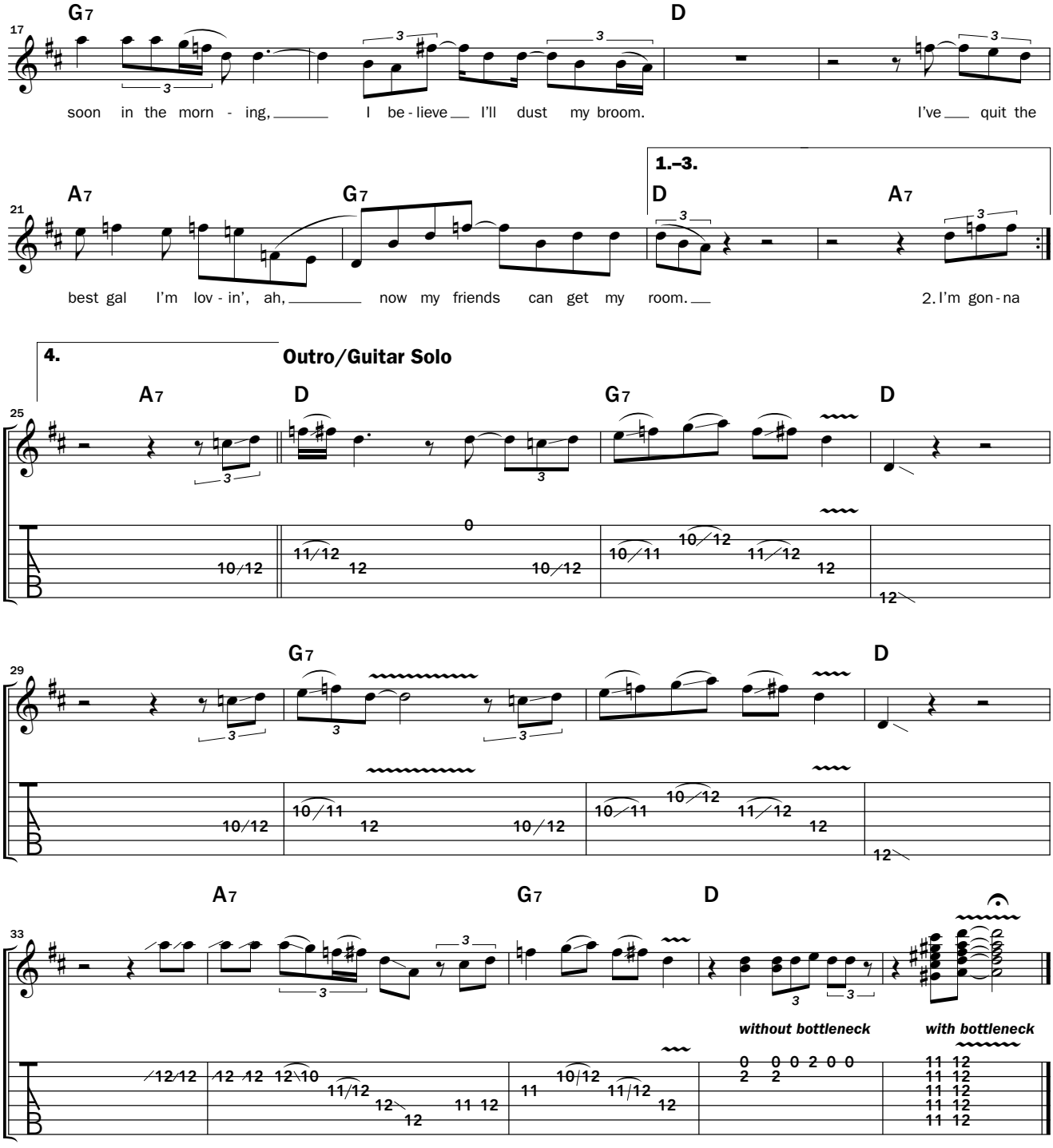
Elmore James Version

Tuning: D A D F♯ A D



Cont. on p. 62

Cont. from p. 61



2. I'm gonna write a letter, telephone every town I know
I'm gonna write a letter, telephone every town I know
If I don't find her in Mississippi, she's over in Westminster, I know

3. And I don't want no woman want every downtown man she meets
Now, I don't want no woman want every downtown man she meets
Means she a no-good, dirty... they shouldn't allow her on the street

4. I believe, I believe my time ain't long
I believe, I believe my time ain't long
I'm gonna leave my baby and break up my happy home

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Auditorium
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This beautiful auditorium style acoustic-electric guitar features a solid mahogany top and an understated dark burst finish. Built-in Fishman Presys electronics add to the versatility of this modern guitar with vintage appeal.

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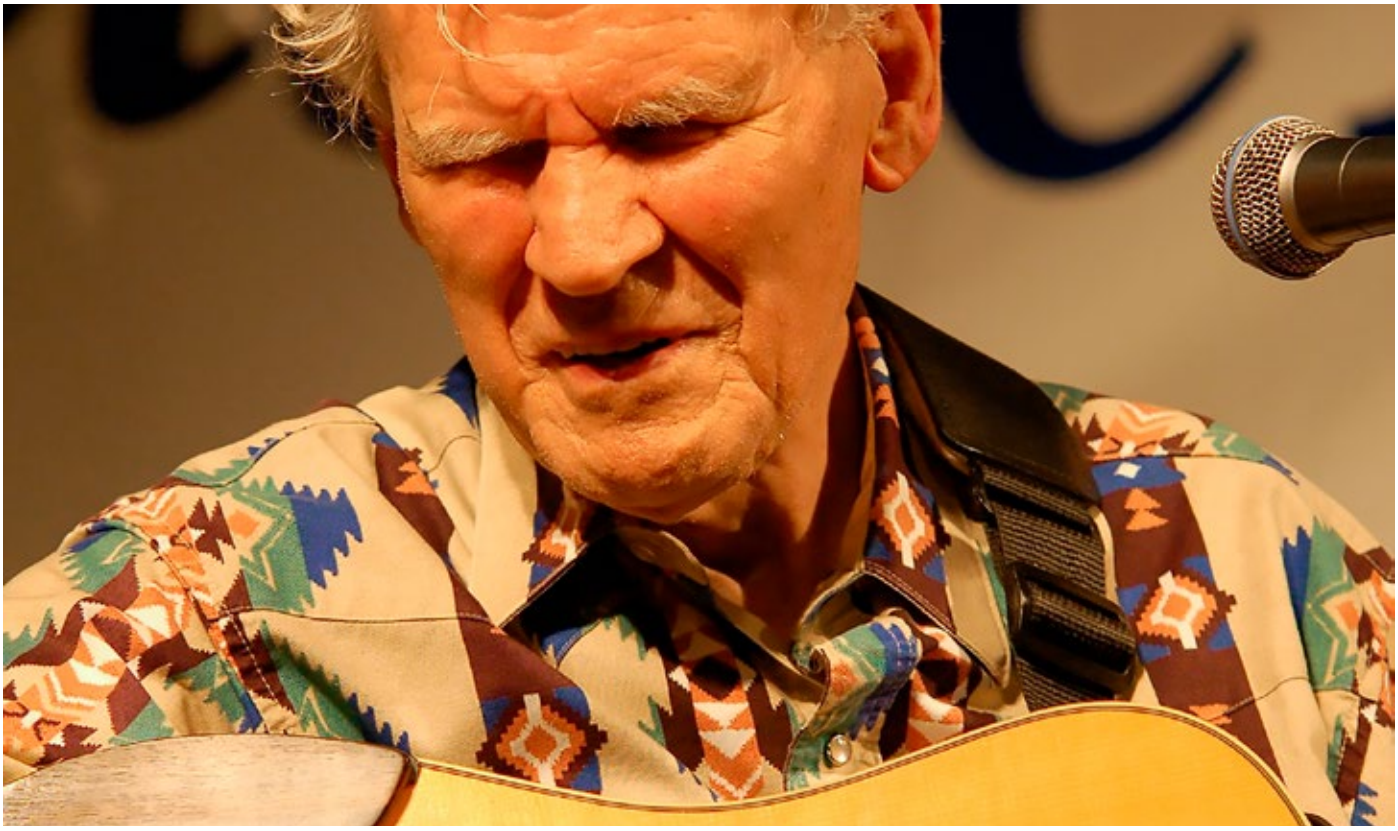
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WATCH DOC WATSON, DEACON DAN CRARY, AND NORMAN BLAKE PLAY "BLACK MOUNTAIN RAG" LIVE IN 1979
acousticguitar.com/tag/july-august-2019

Doc Watson



JOE GIORDANO

Black Mountain Rag

Learn Arthel Lane "Doc" Watson's hot take on a traditional fiddle tune

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

In the early 1960s, during the American folk revival, the blind North Carolinian guitarist Doc Watson stunned audiences with his virtuosic flatpicking, which was virtually without precedent. Watson did much to elevate the status of the steel-string acoustic guitar from a secondary instrument to a rapid-fire soloing voice. But before he rose to prominence, Watson in fact used a solidbody electric guitar. In the 1950s, he played rockabilly and Western swing tunes on his Gibson Les Paul, and out of necessity—he often performed at country dances without the expected fiddler—he taught himself fiddle tunes on that axe.
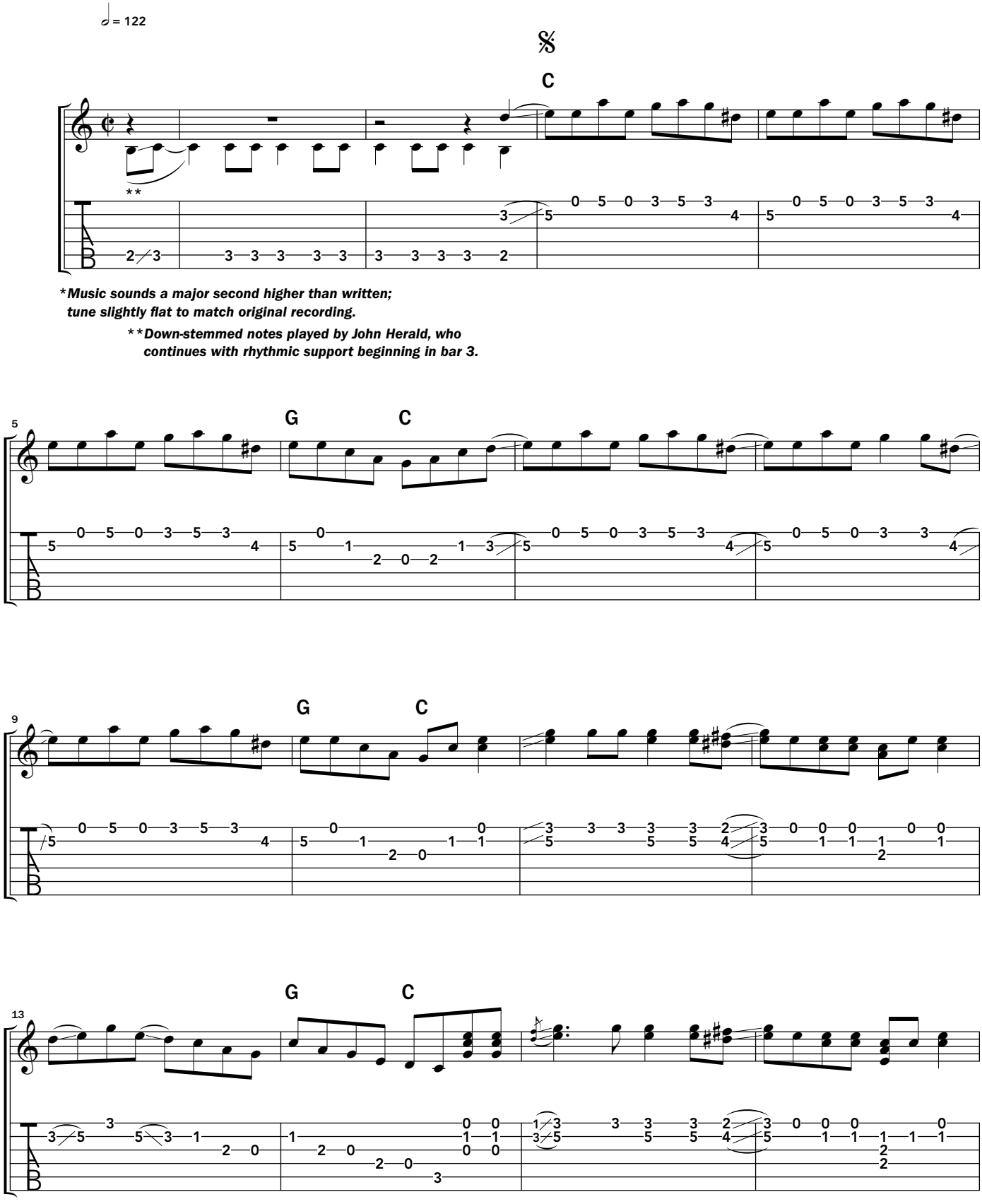
Master flatpicker, songwriter, and producer Bob Minner suspects that the time Watson spent on the Les Paul is what allowed him to develop his prodigious command of the acoustic guitar. "I have no way to prove this, but I believe that Doc developed certain attributes on the electric, like speed and dexterity, that he transferred easily to the acoustic guitar to become the Doc we all know and love," he says.

Watson's 1963 recording of "Black Mountain Rag" (from *The Vanguard Years*) is a prime example of the guitarist's exciting treatment of a traditional fiddle tune. For this particular version, a duet with guitarist John Herald, Watson plays the piece in the key of C major, with a capo at the second fret causing it to sound in D. While Herald, whose part is not shown here in notation (save for the lick in the first two bars), lays down a chugging rhythmic accompaniment, Watson plays singing leads. "I'm not sure exactly how he did it," Minner says. "But I think that because Doc was blind, he was able to concentrate on nuances that escape us mere mortals with sight."

Minner thinks that, unlike the typical bluegrass choice of a thick, heavy plectrum, Watson used a medium flatpick. In learning "Black Mountain Rag," go with whatever pick suits you best, and remember to use alternate picking on the eighth notes—down on the downbeats and up on the upbeats. In order to achieve Watson's effortless-sounding feel at the brisk tempo of 122 half notes per minute, paying close attention to your muscular tension. Minner says, "For playing this—or any barnburner—you're really going to have to learn to relax and avoid the natural tendency to tense up on your picking hand and wrist, as well as your forearm and shoulder."

As with learning any fast fiddle tune, it would certainly pay to use a metronome. Start at the slowest tempo you can play a given phrase or section cleanly, and then work your way up to speed. It might be helpful to feel the pulse in quarter notes rather than halves, and if you go that route, remember that your target tempo is 244 bpm. And once you've polished off "Black Mountain Rag," give yourself a hearty congratulations, as the piece makes an excellent foundation for flatpicking technique in general. "The genesis really starts with Doc Watson," Minner says. AG

***Capo II**
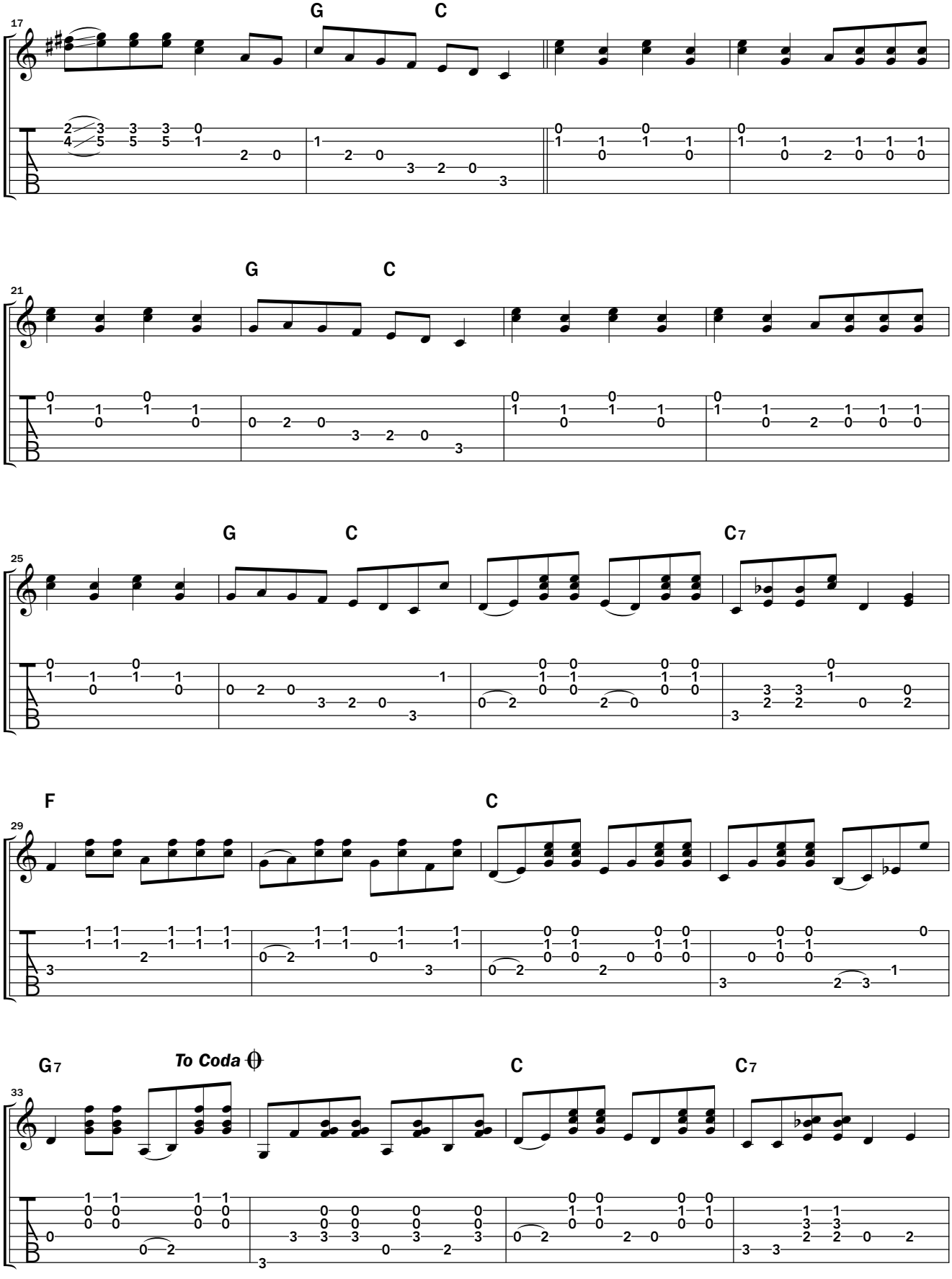


**Music sounds a major second higher than written; tune slightly flat to match original recording.*

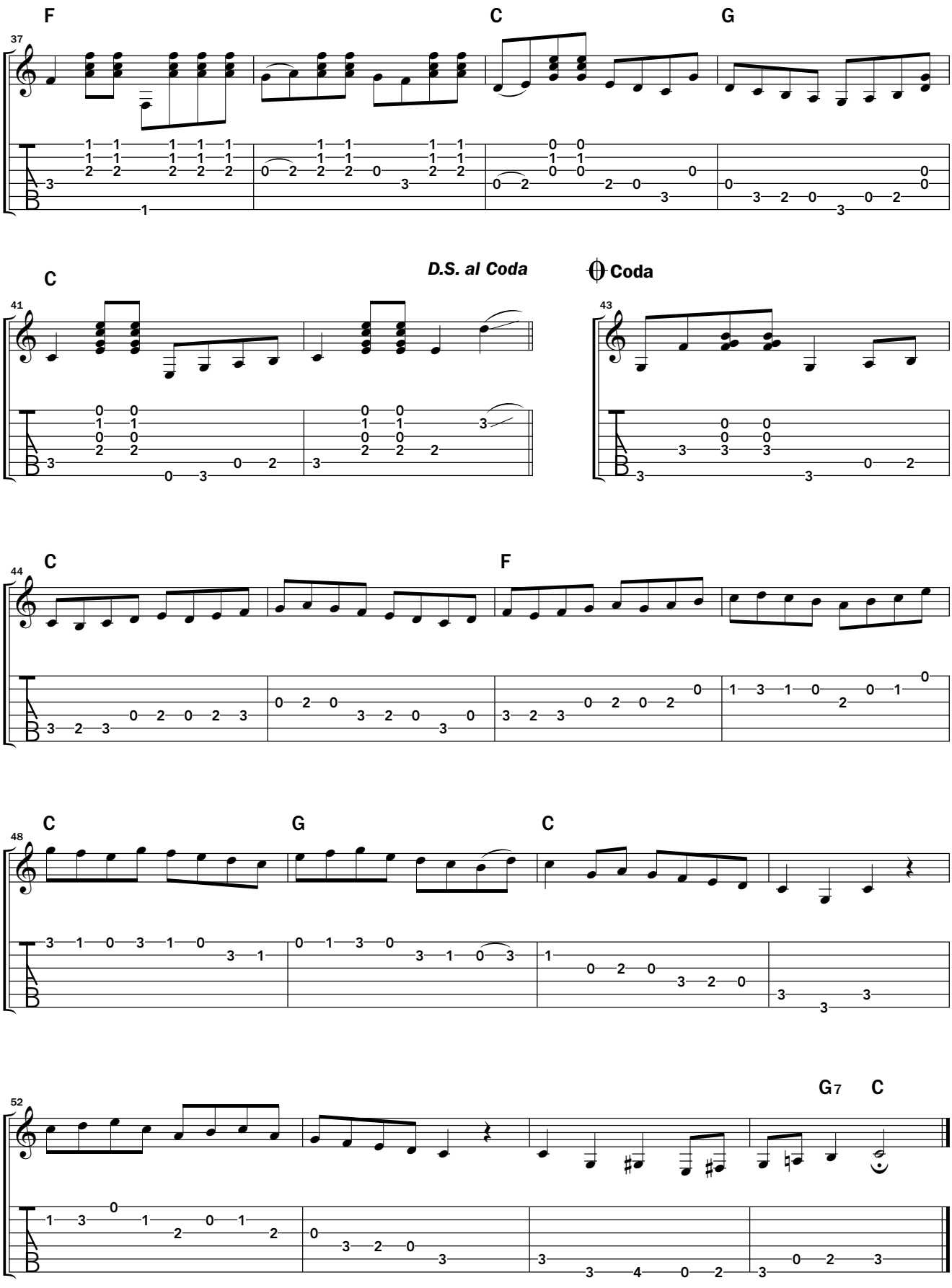
***Down-stemmed notes played by John Herald, who continues with rhythmic support beginning in bar 3.*

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Cont. on p. 66

Cont. from p. 65




F
C
G
37
C
D.S. al Coda
Coda
41
43
C
F
44
C
G
C
48
G7
C
52

This Little Light of Mine

Strumming through one of the great spirituals

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER



Maurice Tani

For nearly 100 years, "This Little Light of Mine" has been a staple of the gospel songbook. The hymnist Harry Dixon Loes originally wrote this spiritual as a children's number, and it found its way into the folk tradition after being gathered by the musicologist John Lomax in 1939. Ray Charles later gave the tune a secular treatment ("This Little Girl of Mine"), and the Everly Brothers followed suit with their own version.

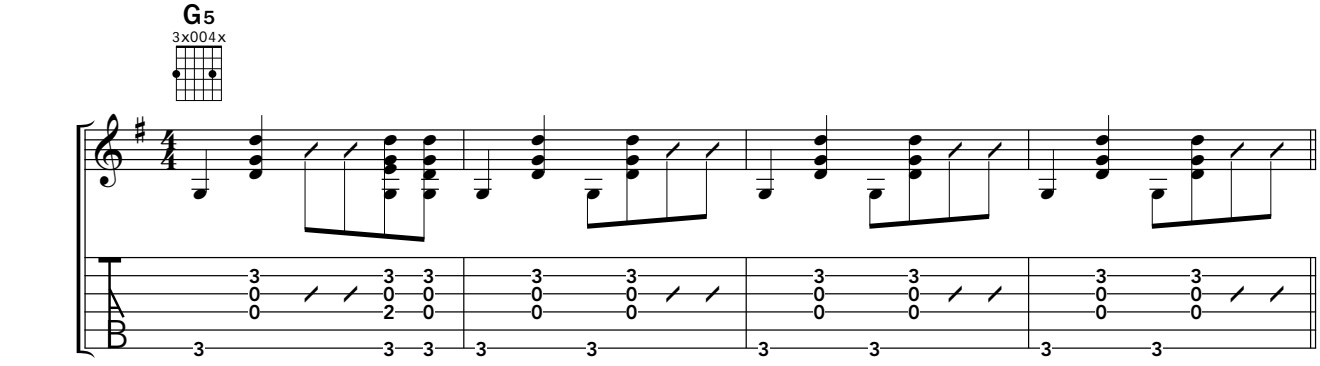
"This Little Light of Mine" is also nicely suited for campfire play, as the San Francisco Bay Area singer-songwriter and guitarist Maurice Tani demonstrates in the accompanying video on *AG*'s website. Tani plays the song in the bright key of G major, with a handful of basic open chords—the first grips that most guitarists learn to play.

To work up "This Little Light of Mine," first make sure that you are familiar with all the chord shapes and can switch between them with relative ease. Note that in his performance, Tani kicks off the piece with a G5 chord (a G chord without its third, B). This makes for a lean and uncluttered sound that stands in contrast to the fuller G chord in the chorus/verse that follows. Also note that he sometimes plays a G7 chord in bar 8, but this is optional; you can just stay on a G chord here if you'd like.

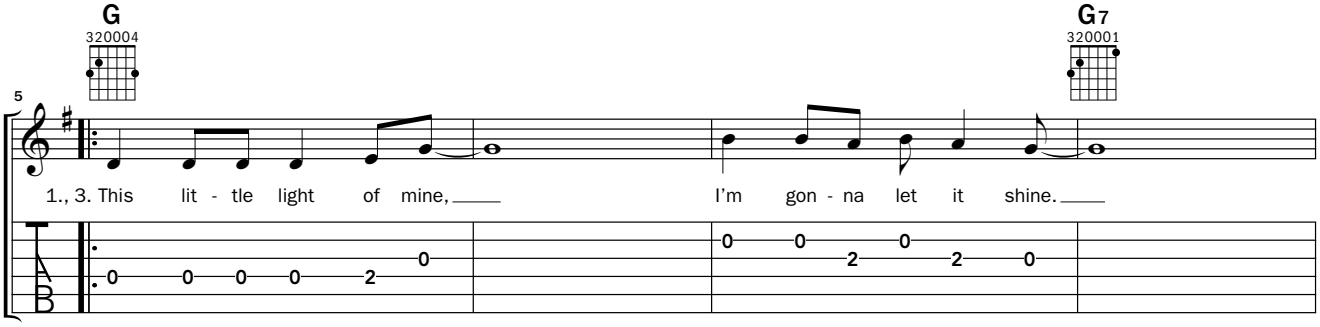
Tani uses a nicely serviceable strumming pattern here. To copy it, worry less about playing what's written in the notation than aiming to hit the lower strings with a solid strum directly on beats 1 and 3, and the higher strings on 2 and 4. Use downward strums on all the beats, and upward strums on the "ands." Play along with Tani's video until you're satisfied that you've captured his solid time feel, and then you'll be well on the way to having "This Little Light of Mine" ready for your next camping trip. AG

THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF MINE — TRADITIONAL
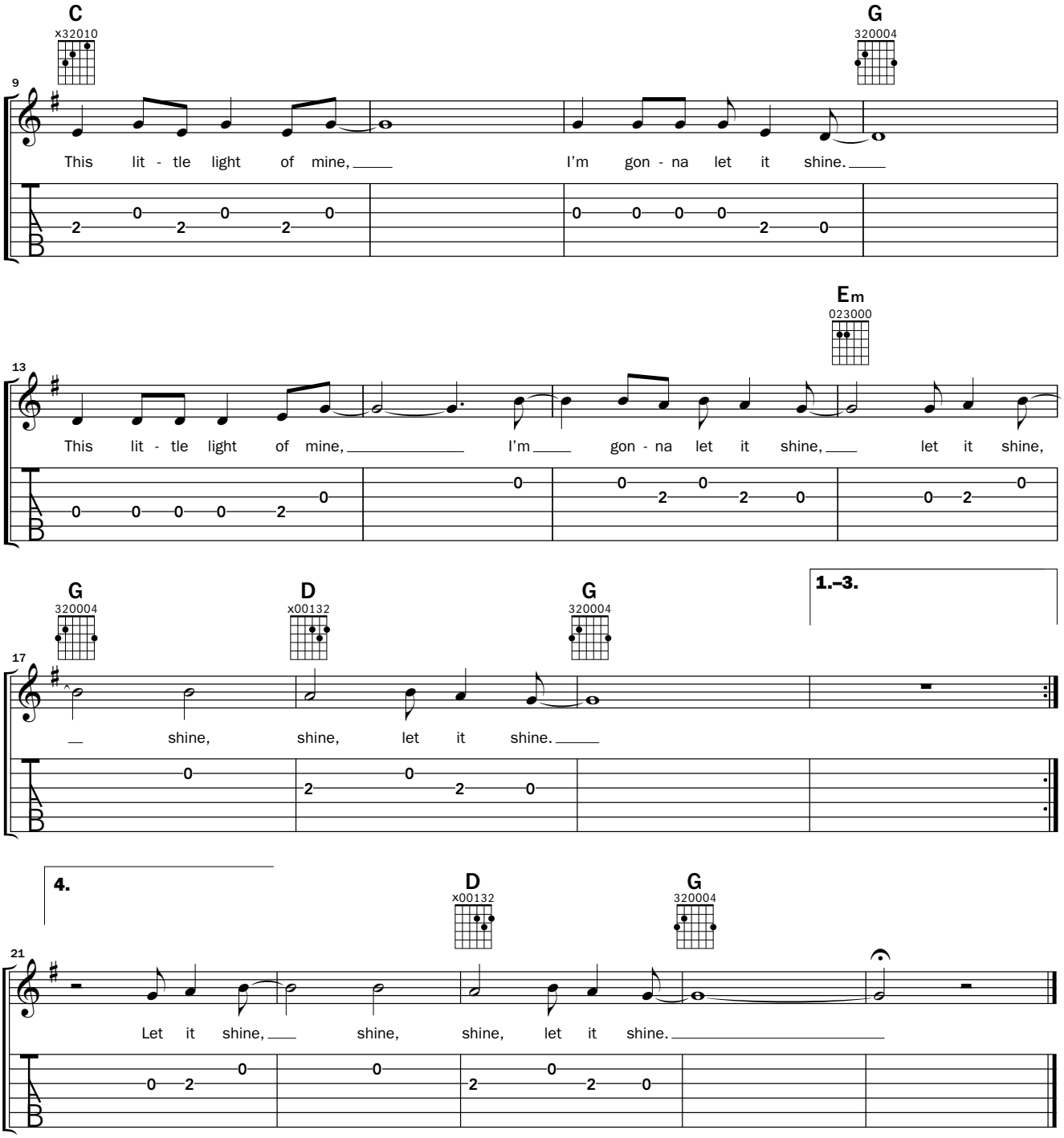
Intro/Basic Strumming Pattern



Chorus/Verse



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2. **G** **G7**
Everywhere I go, I'm gonna let it shine
C **G**
Everywhere I go, I'm gonna let it shine
Em
Everywhere I go, I'm gonna let it shine
G **D** **G**
Let it shine, shine, shine, let it shine

4. **G** **G7**
All up in my house, I'm gonna let it shine
C **G**
All up in my house, I'm gonna let it shine
Em
All up in my house, I'm gonna let it shine
G **D** **G**
Let it shine, shine, shine, let it shine

Tony Klassen carving braces on a New Era guitar.



COURTESY OF TONY KLASSEN

MAKERS & SHAKERS

Capturing the Magic of Vintage Instruments

Tony Klassen of New Era Guitars

BY E. E. BRADMAN

Nowadays, New Era Guitars founder Tony Klassen is best known as a chief proponent and revivalist of old and under-appreciated acoustic guitar designs, a champion of the innovative Swedish brothers Carl and August Larson, Gibson's undercover Kel Kroydon line, the Señorita made by acclaimed banjo makers Bacon & Day, and others. The Indiana-based luthier, who runs a one-man operation, produces impressive reproductions coveted by collectors and pros alike. Forty years ago, however, his life looked very different.

Klassen, who began studying graphic design in 1979, wound up in Chicago at one of the top design firms in the world. By the end of the '80s, he was on the cutting edge of computer illustration and Photoshop, and work was so good that he no longer needed to commute an hour into Chicago from northwest Indiana. He had made it.

Underneath, however, another passion simmered. "Even back then, I always had this thing about guitars," says Klassen, 59. "I started collecting when I was 18 years old—my first was a Gibson J-45 I got for $900." During a short stint in Connecticut as a furniture builder, he taught himself how to make guitars, and when fast-advancing technology—as well as 9/11 and the dot-com bust—brought his graphic design career to a screeching halt, Klassen decided to repurpose the furniture shop he'd built in his house. The rest is history.

What happened when your graphic design career imploded?

I didn't know what to do. I had collected a lot of nice vintage guitars, and I had to sell some of them to pay bills. I had filed for bankruptcy, so I just said, "Screw it. I'm going to start making guitars full-time and see what happens."

How did you get started?

I put together three Larson models, and I knew the owners of the best vintage shops, so I knew I had some outlets. But before I showed

them to a shop, I wanted to get the OK from my friend Bob Hartman, the grandson of Carl Larson. Well, Bob was really happy with what I'd done. Then I took them to Elderly Instruments, and they were blown away and wanted to consign them. That gave me a little kick-start, and then Dave Portman, a prominent Larson collector and friend who came up with the name New Era, began commissioning replicas of his vintage Larson guitars.

What drew you to Larson Brothers guitars?
They pioneered some of the first steel-string guitars—they got patents in the early 1900s—and they were laminating their braces, putting a center strip of rosewood and then two pieces of spruce sandwiched to that for a stronger brace. The Larsons also built their guitars with a slight arch to the top, more so than a Gibson, and much more than a Martin. They were putting steel rods in the body to help keep tension off the top so the guitars vibrated more. Their aesthetics were great, too—the big wide bands of pearl around the top and fancy inlays.

What else impressed you?
Most of the guitar shops of the day, especially the big ones like Martin and Gibson, were factories with lots of people. With the Larsons, it was just those two guys. These were truly handmade guitars, and I thought that was pretty exciting. Another thing was that nobody was making them. People were making copies of Martins and Gibsons, but nobody had carried on the Larson tradition.

Why weren't more people making Larson-style instruments?
Because they're rare. If you're going to build a guitar in the vein of another maker and carry on what they're doing, you really need to have one of their guitars. When I was making money doing graphic design, I was investing it in Larson Brothers guitars, which really gave me a feel for the instruments.

Is there a lot of variation among their instruments?
They're all unique. If you looked at ten Martins, you probably couldn't tell them apart, but not the Larsons. They're wacky guitars, and the quality is pretty good.

What kind of adjustments have you made to the Larson template?
I felt the braces were just too heavy, so I've changed that, but I'm still building in their tradition. They have a unique voice, and I think I was able to capture that.

What about your Bacon & Day Señorita reproduction?
I knew there were other unique guitars out there that nobody was doing. I've been a huge fan of John Fahey for as long as I can remember. When I bought the [1967] *Requia* album, he had this very cool guitar on it, and it was a Bacon & Day Señorita. We only know of two—John Fahey's and another one, which came up for sale. I bought it and thought it was cool. When I started making a copy of that guitar, I got calls from Country Joe McDonald and Stefan Grossman. Back in the '60s, Stefan had found the original and taken it to a guy in Berkeley, who voiced the braces and put a pickguard on it. Stefan sold it to John Fahey, who sold it to Country Joe McDonald, who sold it to a guy out in England.

I probably build more Señoritas than anything, and it has a lot to do with the Fahey connection. I built a couple for Stefan and he shows them off every now and then. That was the first non-Larson that I did.

'Screw it. I'm going to start making guitars full-time and see what happens.'
TONY KLASSEN

You've done some Kel Kroydon copies, too.
Gibson made the Kel Kroydon line during the Depression, but they didn't put their name on those guitars, which they sold through Montgomery Ward. They never wanted people to know that the Kel Kroydons were Gibson guitars. It was their way of trying to survive the Depression. Some really nice guitars came out of that era, around 1929, 1930.

What do you think makes guitars from that era so good?
I don't know, but my theory is that people were just so happy to have a job during those times that they were doing their best work. Those guitars were built a lot lighter, and they had gone up from 12-fret neck joints to 14-fret neck joints, so there was a lot of innovation. They switched from bar frets to T-frets, which made them better. As time went on, companies started making guitars heavy, and they just don't sound like guitars did back in the 1930–1934 period.

How does being a player influence you as a builder?
Being a player totally helps. I don't know how you could fully understand a guitar if you can't play it. I mean, you can make a beautiful guitar, but if it doesn't play, then what's the point?

I love the story of how you got your first Larson, a Euphonon, from George Gruhn in 1985.
Somehow I'd wound up with a Martin 000-28, but my goal was to get a pearl-trimmed guitar. George had a 00-45, so I called him up, told him I had a 000-28, and asked if he'd trade. He said he'd give me $2,500 for it. The 00-45 was $3,000. So, I made the trip down to Nashville, and George introduced me to a lot of guitars, but the one he was really excited about was this square-shouldered Euphonon by the Larson Brothers. I thought it was cool, but man, I really wanted that 00-45.

The next day he put me in a quiet room, and every time I'd play the Larson, he'd knock on the door, poke his head in, and say, "I can tell when you're playing that one." It was a loud guitar, much more powerful than the little 00-45. I was dabbling in Fahey, [Leo] Kottke, and [Peter] Lang, and the Larson just had the tone for that. Plus, the night before, when George had introduced the guitar to me, he had given me a book that Bob Hartman had written about his grandfather Carl Larson and his great uncle August. That book intrigued me, and pushed me in that direction, too. I ended up getting that Euphonon, and it changed the course of history for me.

George really wanted you to tell folks about the Larson Brothers.
Yes, he did. As I was leaving, he said, "Make sure you spread the word." When I saw him 30-something years later, I told him he was responsible for me doing this, and he chuckled.

As a one-man shop, how do you find time to do everything it takes to run the business?
Well, you have to schedule time for everything. I work seven days a week, pretty much. This is my retirement. I love being in my shop, and it just goes smoothly. Also, if you're going to make money at this, you have to be efficient. I'm always rearranging the shop, thinking about how I can do things a little better. The way the shop flows, what tools I have, where they are in the shop—I like being posed with those sorts of questions or problems.

You don't want interns or an assistant?
If I had somebody in here, I don't think I'd be able to work. I've been self-employed for the last 25 years, and I'm approaching 14 years making guitars. There's a freedom to just being by myself. Sometimes I lock the door, shut the blinds, and don't answer my phone. I live near hiking trails and a national park, so I can step out, dig nature for a little while, and then come back with a clear head.

You once said that in the process of building an instrument, you become one with the guitar.
Totally. I have a hero, George Nakashima, who made beautiful furniture in the Philadelphia area. He would sleep on his wood before he began a project. I was very inspired by him.

Do you have time to dream up original creations?
I don't have time, but some day I might. Right now, I really like sticking to this tradition and doing these reproductions.

Does working this way give you insight into the old masters' thought processes?
Oh, yeah. I'm self-taught, and I learned by looking at guitars. I'm still learning, and I'll be learning until I'm not doing this anymore.

Who are your customers?
Guitarists who can't afford a $50,000 Larson, so they have me make them one. A lot of my customers are repeat buyers; many of them have two of my guitars, and some even have six. They're mostly baby boomers in their 60s. I'm 59 years old, and rarely do I make New Era guitars for anybody in their 50s.

Is it important to get your instruments into the hands of younger players?
My Crooked Star line of guitars is aimed at players in their 30s who can't afford much but want a decent handmade guitar. The Crooked Star guitars have just a couple dots on the fingerboard for inlays; there's no back binding, and the finish is just a semi-gloss, which can save me weeks. They're beautiful.

Do you think about how your instruments will age?
I think about how after I'm long gone, these guitars will be out there with people playing them. The thing I love about vintage instruments is that they're magical, and I just hope that's what I'm giving to people. You take pieces of wood, you put them together, and they make music, so that's pretty cool. Maybe I'll be in a vintage guitar book 50 or 60 years from now. People might be researching me on the internet—who was this guy? I think about that kind of stuff.

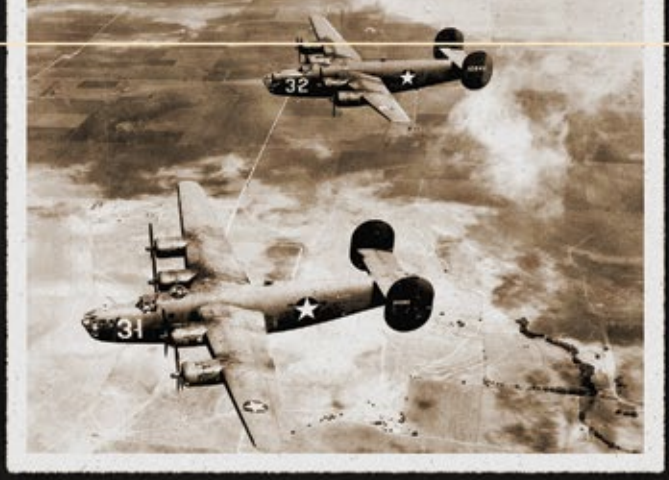
What would you tell a luthier who wanted to follow in your footsteps?
Dig in and give it your best. If you can make a good-sounding guitar, you're probably going to sell it. AG



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COURTESY OF TONY KLASSEN







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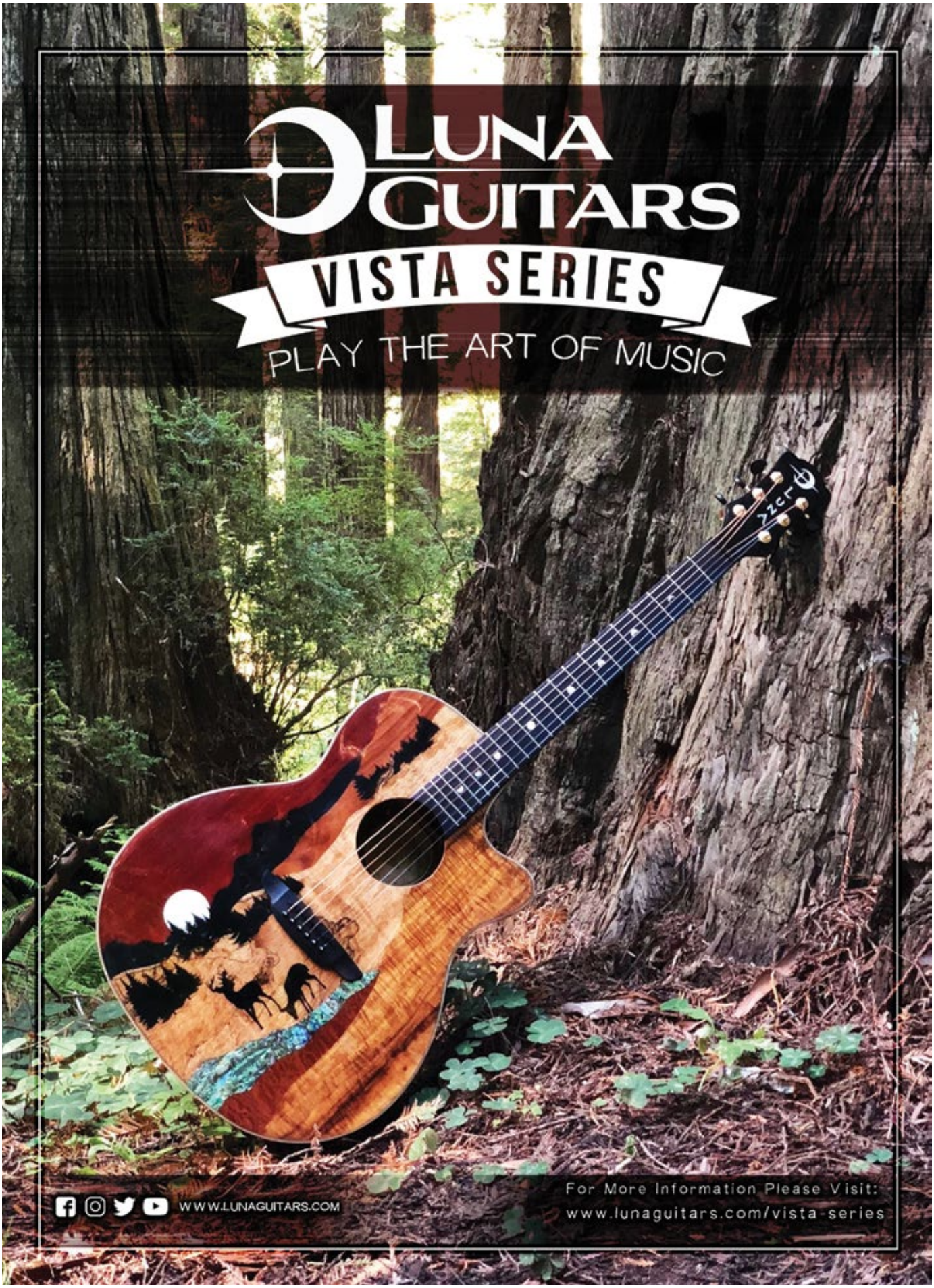
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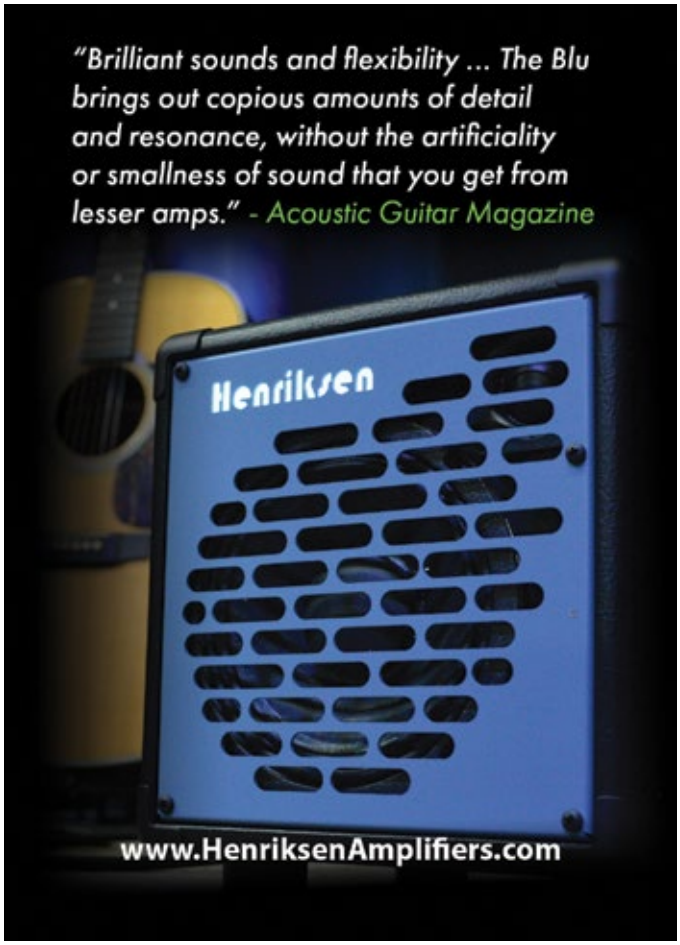
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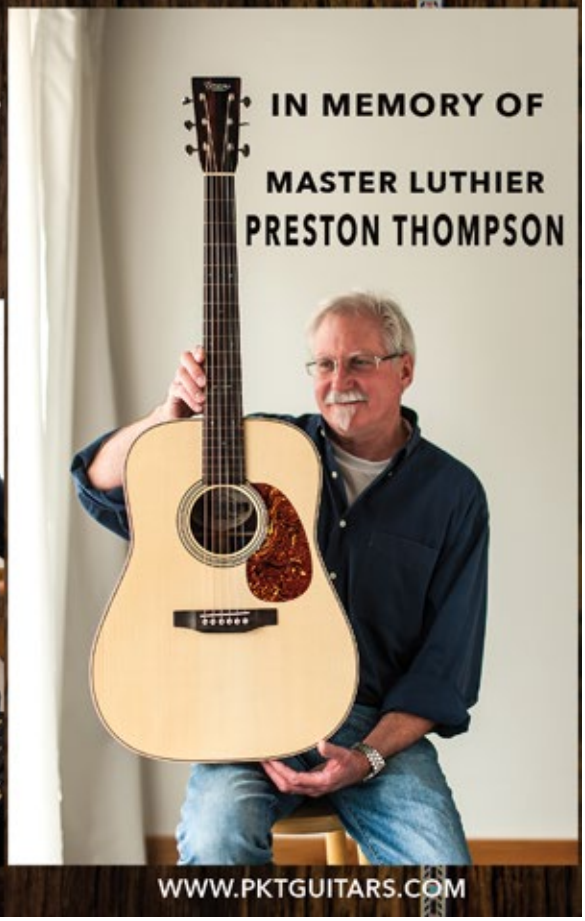
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EXPERIENCE YOUR GUITAR LIKE NEVER BEFORE

Taking a Break

How to minimize string breakage–and what to do when it happens

BY MAMIE MINCH

No worries—breaking a string is actually a non-event.



Q: I recently got my first acoustic guitar and am having lots of fun with it, learning Delta blues and some fingerstyle pieces. I've started to play a bit in open-D tuning, and honestly it freaks me out a little to retune my guitar so often! Is it safe for the guitar? Am I making the strings weaker, or more prone to break while I'm playing? If they break while I'm playing or retuning the guitar, could it hurt me? I've never broken a string before. Am I worrying unnecessarily?

—Julian, via email

A: Gentle reader, welcome to the world of acoustic guitar! It sounds like you are generally adjusting well and learning new things—but you have some fears that are a bit out of proportion. I'd like to help you lay them to rest. It's great that you're trying out open D; it's lots of fun and can make more songs accessible to a new player. You're wondering if it's safe for the guitar, the strings, and the player to switch back and forth between standard and open tunings.

It's common for new players to feel scared about breaking strings while playing or tuning. Let's start here: I guarantee that this will occasionally happen during the course of your life as a guitar player, and more often if you switch tunings. You're playing the thing, not staring at it, right? But unless something is a bit off, you'll really have to play it hard to make that happen. I'd like you to come away from this article with some knowledge about how to do things right, and knowing that when you do break a string, it's not going to be that bad. I promise!

Minimizing the risk is simple: start with a guitar that is setup and strung well, with good-quality strings that aren't too old. Age is the most common cause of breakage—if your strings are oxidized or worn, it's time to change them! Another reason you might break a string is a rough surface touching it at some point. This could be a saddle with an extra-sharp takeoff point or a tuning machine with a burr that rubs against the string. It will become clear if you keep breaking a string at the same spot. If you're feeling nervous, take your guitar in for a routine setup and mention the problem to your tech.

Occasionally, a string will be faulty—a plain steel string could pull its winds down by the bridge, or have a kink that makes it prone to breakage, but this is pretty rare. In fact, only someone like me, who restrings dozens of guitars a week, really has to think about that. A good rule is to slowly tighten a string up to pitch (always up, not down, to the desired note); you won't over-tighten it that way.

So, we've established that you will break strings, but there's good reason not to be scared. Think about how you hold a guitar while you tune it: in your lap, with the soundhole facing away from you. If you do break a string, it will almost always be one of the higher ones, and the tail would tend to snap outward, perpendicular to the guitar's top, definitely not up toward your face. Unless you like to smell the soundhole while you tune, you'll be safe. And when a string breaks, it doesn't snap exaggeratedly out and whip everything in its path; it snaps with some power, and once the tension is released, it goes slack. It's a non-event, I promise. You hear a *twang!*, feel a bit surprised, and then kind of shrug your shoulders.

I hope you can learn to be comfortable embracing a tiny bit of risk as you learn to play your acoustic guitar—the rewards are worth it!

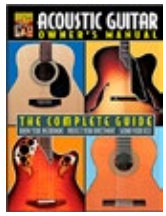
Mamie Minch is the co-owner of Brooklyn Lutherie and an active blues performer. brooklynlutherie.com



Mamie Minch

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NEW GEAR

Iris Guitar Company OG Standard

A luthier-made guitar for the working musician

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

A couple of years ago, Adam Buchwald, the luthier behind the Vermont-based Circle Strings, realized he had a small problem. He had no difficulty selling his custom steel-string guitars and mandolins, priced at $4,000 and up, but as he recently told *AG* contributing writer Nick Millevoi (see Makers & Shakers in the February 2019 issue), he felt bad that most of the working musicians he knew could not afford them.

To address this problem, Buchwald started a new brand, the Iris Guitar Company, and designed a no-frills guitar that would be easier to produce while sounding and playing just as well as a Circle Strings instrument. With the price point of $1,999 in mind, the luthier did away with the pearl ornamentation, pore filler, and high-gloss finish of a Circle Strings guitar—details that require a considerable time investment to do cleanly—and he also opted for a two-piece neck instead of his standard one-piece.

For these instruments, Buchwald also settled on a single slope-shouldered body shape, which he dubbed OG, inspired by Gibson's X-braced LG guitars. The body is designed to appeal to a wide range of players. It's deeper at the tail-block than an LG, for enhanced bass response. For the fretboard, Buchwald settled on a 25-inch scale length—easy to measure, comfortable for the fretting hand, and right in between Gibson's shorter 24.75-inch scale and Martin's standard 25.4-inch.

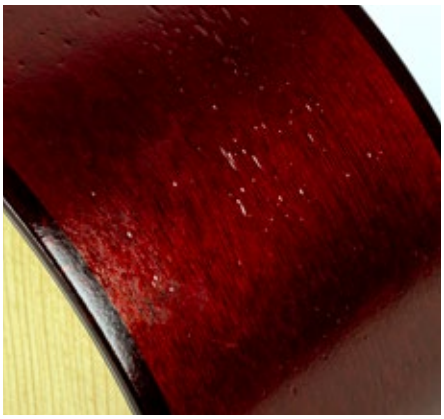
With the help of his employees, Nick Durkee and Bobby Webb (soon to be joined by Dale Fairbanks of Fairbanks Guitars), Buchwald hand-makes each Iris OG with quality woods: a Carpathian or Sitka soundboard with non-scalloped Adirondack spruce braces and Honduran (or African) mahogany back and sides, naturally all solid. Instead of ebony or rosewood, he uses katalox for the fretboard and bridge, which means the guitar can be shipped internationally without issue. To keep things simple, Buchwald limits the options to a natural, sunburst, or











black finish; a mahogany top; and an electric version with a Curtis Novak P-90 pickup. I checked out the base model Iris OG and found it to be a winner in every respect.

A SUPERB PLAYER

Being a sucker for a good glossy lacquer finish and tasteful mother-of-pearl decorations, it was slightly underwhelming to remove the Iris from its included lightweight Gator polyfoam case for the first time. The satin finish and absence of pore filler felt a bit less refined than what I'm accustomed to. But it was immediately clear that the guitar was a top-notch instrument, and I thought nothing more of the missing bling after playing the OG for just a few minutes.

The Iris' terrific-feeling neck, with a perfect rounded-C profile that's .880 at the first fret, split the difference between skinny modern and vintage hefty. Buzz-free and set up with low action, the neck was nice and easy in all positions, and the satin finish gave it a smooth and fast feel. Though the nut is 1-11/16 inches wide, as opposed to the 1-3/4-inch nut many players prefer, the neck isn't noticeably narrow, and it doesn't feel cramped for fretting chords or for fingerpicking.

The OG body size is super comfortable, too. Though my personal preference is for an OM, I felt right at home on the Iris. This lightweight guitar seems to float on the lap, and it feels well balanced between its body and its headstock. The body's satin finish feels inviting as well, without any of the stickiness under the forearm (and the accompanying finish clouding) that's par for the course with gloss-finished instruments.

DYNAMICALLY VOICED

It might be a cliché, but in this case, it's true: The Iris sounds every bit as good as it feels and plays—far beyond any vintage LG I've tried. Overall, it has a warm and dry voice, with an impressive midrange response. It takes equally well to being strummed with a pick or fingerpicked, in standard or open tunings, and it has a generous amount of headroom and projection.

I had the pleasure of using the Iris in preparing some of this issue's notation, and the guitar sounded terrific in the various contexts covered in these pages. When I played through Fred Sokolow's Basics lesson on the minor pentatonic scale (see page 40), using a BlueChip TP50 pick, the guitar had an appealing bark and presence, and it felt easy to bend the strings. For Richard Thompson's "She Twists the Knife Again" (page 54), with its aggressive hybrid picking, the notes had excellent clarity and assertiveness.

To put it another way, the Iris has a wonderfully adaptive voice, and it's easy to see how it will appeal to musicians of all genres, whether for accompaniment, lead work, or for ensemble or solo performance.

THE BOTTOM LINE

If this Iris OG is any indication, Adam Buchwald has hit the nail on the head with respect to creating a relatively affordable handcrafted guitar for the working musician. Although it's true that the Iris Guitar Company faces formidable competition from other US makers offering guitars with similar styling and price points—Martin's 15 series and Collings' Waterloo line come to mind—Iris has the distinction of being made in a much smaller shop, by a single builder and his two colleagues. It's an almost unheard-of value in a market where a luthier-made new guitar can easily cost ten grand. AG

SPECS

BODY OG body (14-3/8" lower bout, 11-1/4" upper bout, 19-1/4" long); Carpathian or Sitka spruce top with red spruce non-scalloped X-braces and scalloped tone bars; Honduran or African mahogany back and sides; tortoise pickguard; open-pore satin nitrocellulose lacquer finish

NECK 14-fret 25"-scale mahogany neck with scarfed headstock joint and glued-up heel. Full C-shape profile; two-way adjustable truss rod; mortise-and-tenon bolt-on neck joint; katalox fretboard with 1/16" plastic dot position markers; 1-11/16" nut; nickel Grover Sta-Tite tuners; satin nitrocellulose lacquer finish

OTHER Bone nut and compensated saddle; katalox bridge with 2-5/32" spacing; white plastic bridge pins; D'Addario EJ16 strings (.012–.053); Gator polyfoam case

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Martin OM-28 Modern Deluxe

C. F. Martin & Company adds cutting-edge touches to its venerable orchestra model

BY KATE KOENIG

It goes without saying that C. F. Martin & Company holds itself to a high standard when it comes to making guitars—so when Martin announced a new line featuring modern updates to vintage models in January of this year, it came with a reasonable level of excitement. Just the notion of modifying a classic could make a loyal traditionalist queasy, but if our review model is any indication, the adjustments make for slight yet powerful improvements.

The OM-28 Modern Deluxe is a lightweight orchestra-bodied guitar, with a blend of vintage and modern features that merge to form a unique, cutting-edge composition. Its classic features include the use of protein glue and the application of Martin's signature Vintage Tone System (VTS) on the Sitka spruce top with scalloped Adirondack braces to recreate the sound of an 80-year-old Martin tone right out of the case. A torrefaction process that allows manufacturers to age wood with a groundbreaking level of precision, VTS was first used on the Authentic Series in 2015. The Modern Deluxe series is the first set of production models to feature VTS-treated tops and braces since.

Also in the classic tradition is the slightly skewed, asymmetrical neck. While playing a 1930 OM-45 De Luxe from Martin's museum collection, designers at the company discovered the vintage neck had an apex that wasn't directly centered, so that the slope under the thumb was different than that under the rest of the fingers. Upon investigating a 1931 OM-28, they found the shape was even more dramatic—then applied this to the OM-28 Modern Deluxe. The neck is also rather thin and required designers to modify the thickness of the fingerboard—making it lower in profile than today's standard—to accommodate it. The asymmetrical neck is featured in combination with the High Performance Taper, which narrows the width of the fretboard faster than on traditional models (1-3/4 inches at the nut, 2-5/32-inch string spacing at the bridge).



Modern adjustments include a new stronger and lighter two-way titanium truss rod (no less than 64 percent lighter than the standard steel), bridge pins made in partnership with Liquidmetal Technologies (created with the unique Liquidmetal alloy that increases volume about 3db), and a composite carbon-fiber bridge plate, made of a layer of Adirondack spruce between two layers of carbon fiber and designed to increase volume without adding weight.

EXCELLENT VOLUME AND RESPONSE

Out of the case, the OM-28 makes a luxurious but artistically tasteful impression—the natural top wood and maple binding give it class, while the white, red-dotted Liquidmetal bridge pins, gold frets, and gold Waverly tuners give it character. True to vintage form, there's a diamond volute at the base of the headstock; more an aesthetic choice, it makes little to no difference in playability. The inlays are abalone, both on the fretboard and headstock logo, which is done in the script style of the Martin 1930s design—an homage to the line's vintage roots, as well as a design first for the company since the '30s.

When played, the first thing you notice about the OM-28 is its volume. This guitar would have been ideal for the pre-electronic era—with minimal effort, the sound is booming, to the point where in a naturally resonant space, such as a cathedral or just a large, bare room with high ceilings, someone might wonder if it's not actually plugged in. Combined with the shallow depth of the orchestra body style, its natural projection is even more impressive.

The sound is incredibly crisp and warm. Part of what contributes to the guitar's natural volume is its rich midrange and low end, especially noticeable when I play open chords—it's a steamroller! Despite its classy, trim appearance, the guitar feels like a wild animal with unbridled energy when you're playing it. Strike the sixth string—especially in dropped-D tuning—and it carries so impressively, even as you continue to pick the other strings. You almost have to mute it manually to get it quiet.

What the high end may lack in power is made up for in crispness and clarity. Simple, fingerpicked intervals high on the neck ring out beautifully, and the harmonics are brilliant. While playing the guitar for the first time, I even came up with a few new song ideas, inspired just by the guitar's pure tones high on the neck.

A VERSATILE PERFORMER

OMs have a reputation for being fingerpicking guitars, and this guitar is no exception. Individually picked notes ring out clearly throughout the fretboard, on every string, from the bottom all the way up to around the 15th fret and further. The fretboard is incredibly live in general, so there really aren't any dead zones, just some ranges that are a bit louder and more resonant than others. It responds twice as warmly to careful precision, and its sensitivity makes it easy to accidentally bring out harmonics.

Because of how easy it is to produce volume and power, the OM-28 proves itself as a versatile guitar. Take a heavy pick to it, and you accentuate its natural brightness. Strum it forcefully, and you get a sound that will carry in an open-air setting. Because the resonating overtones are so big, they tend to compound if it's slightly out of tune. Heavy strumming can make the low end somewhat overpowering over the higher tones.

Like a fighter plane that's being engineered to have as little weight as possible, the sleek, asymmetrical neck is another element that contributes to the guitar's lightweight yet powerful resonance and comfortable playability. Overall, it's navigable yet still enough to grip, while the High Performance Taper makes it even easier to maneuver quickly as you go up the neck.

In short, Martin sought to create a guitar that's ultramodern yet traditional and has certainly succeeded. While the OM-28 Modern Deluxe is especially suited to provide rich chordal textures and give vibrancy to fingerpicking compositions, it makes for a great folk, jazz, or blues instrument—and anything in between. AG









SPECS

BODY 14-fret orchestra size; Vintage Tone System (VTS) Sitka spruce top; East Indian rosewood back and sides; VTS Adirondack spruce scalloped X-bracing; protein glue; ebony bridge, composite carbon fiber bridgeplate, bone saddle, Liquidmetal bridge pins and 2-1/4" string spacing at the saddle; faux tortoiseshell pickguard and European flamed maple binding; polished gloss finish

NECK Genuine mahogany asymmetrical neck; ebony fretboard with abalone diamond and square inlays; mother-of-pearl side dots; 25-2/5" scale length; 1-3/4" wide bone nut; 1930s Martin script abalone headstock inlay; Waverly butterbean gold tuners; satin finsh with polished headplate

EXTRAS Martin Authentic Acoustic Lifespan 2.0 Light strings (.012–054); ply hardshell case

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Palmer Acoustic Pocket Amp

A petite, versatile preamp and DI

BY SEAN MCGOWAN



Most gigging acoustic guitarists know the importance of a great-sounding, reliable preamp/DI box. Not only will a DI allow you to directly interface with a house PA system via the XLR output, but the preamp can help you sculpt the best possible sonic reproduction of your guitar via EQ, blend well with other musicians on stage, and tame potential feedback issues. Last but not least, a preamp amplifies the inherently weak signal from your guitar's passive pickup and correctly matches impedance values with the rest of your signal chain.

The Acoustic Pocket Amp from Germany's Palmer Musical Instruments is a versatile, feature-laden musical tool for acoustic (or electric) guitars with piezo, transducer, or magnetic pickups that serves these functions and more. Its diminutive size (roughly the footprint of a drink coaster) makes it super easy to grab-and-go anywhere you need to play.

Even with its small size, the Acoustic Pocket Amp is packed with essential features such as a 3-band EQ section (tuned for acoustic instruments with a semi-parametric mid control with frequency sweep); gain, blend, notch filter, and polarity controls; XLR, 1/4-inch, and headphone outputs; an effects loop; and a stompbox-style mute switch. One unique feature is the three-way "Style" switch, which changes the character of the sound between Vintage, Modern, and Flat settings.

When I explored the preamp in my home studio and on a jazz-duo gig with an acoustic bassist, I used an archtop with a magnetic pickup, as well as my 16-inch flattop acoustic with passive K&K pickups installed. Although I didn't have to worry about the volume of a drummer, the room was fairly loud, with about 80–100 people in attendance throughout the evening.

I ran the Pocket Amp directly into my amp (at a low-volume setting), and there was plenty of gain and headroom available—more than you'd need for any gig, with or without a house system. This is really more of a "set it and forget it" device, but you may need your reading glasses and a flashlight to see the small words and numbers on the preamp. Still, I appreciated that the white knobs were easy to see on stage.

So how does it sound? At the risk of being cliché, I really couldn't get a "bad" sound out of it. At every setting, the sound is clear, strong, and very responsive to the playing nuances. In addition to the Style switch, there's a three-way Mode switch, toggling between A.B. (full-range), A.G. (low-frequency roll-off), and MAGN (for magnetic pickups). Of course, your ears should always be the judge (I preferred the A.B. setting on my guitar with a magnetic pickup, for example). Between these Style and Mode switches and the EQ, there are plenty of tonal variations available. I found that the EQ was fairly subtle, however—I had to really turn the knobs to achieve a significantly different tone. Depending on your taste and requirements, this may be a pro or con. I like the different default Modes and Styles settings in tandem with the EQ, though the switches seemed a little flimsy. I'd probably keep the Palmer on one or two settings in live situations and change more frequently in a studio setting. AG

SPECS

INPUTS 1/4" with -12dB pad, 1/8" aux in, and tuner thru

OUTPUTS 1/4", balanced XLR with ground lift, and 1/8" headphone

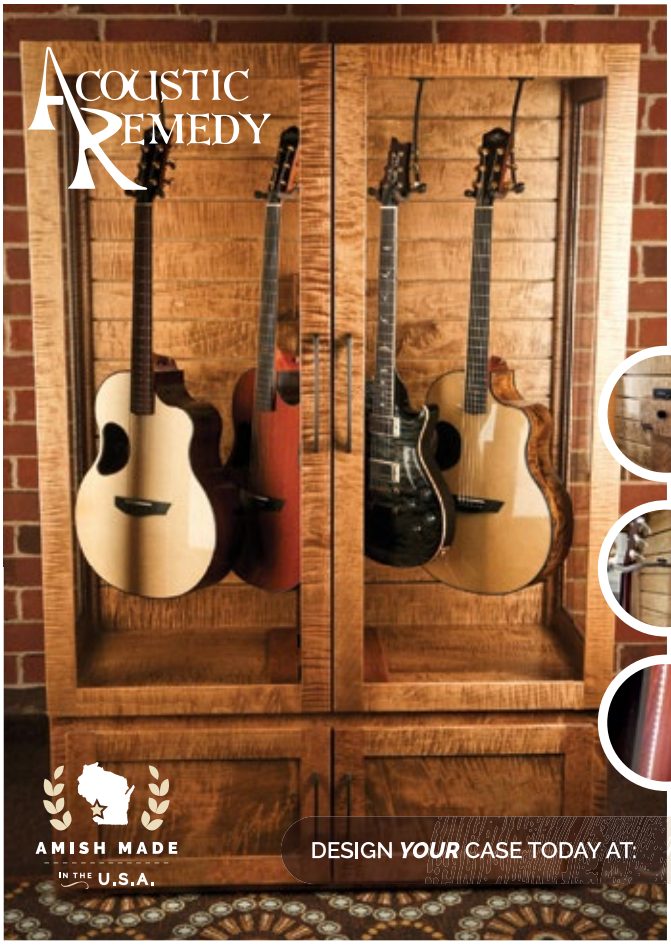
CONTROLS Bass (±12dB@100Hz–3dB), Mid (±12dB@150Hz–8kHz), Highs (±12dB@7.5kHz–3dB), Notch (20Hz–400Hz), Blend, Gain (32dB max), Mode (Magn.: magnetic pickup; A.G.: acoustic guitar with low-end roll off; A.B.: full range); Style (Flat, Modern, Vintage), Volume

OTHER 9-volt or AC power; 14.5 ounces (w/o battery); effects loop; polarity; DI pre/post; footswitch (selectable for mute or bypass)

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MagSlide

A lightweight alternative to the common bottleneck slide

BY PETE MADSEN



The most common materials for bottleneck slides are steel, brass, glass, and ceramic. I have also seen slides fashioned from copper tubing and plastic cylinders. Now comes the MagSlide, made of magnesium, the eighth most abundant element, as well as the lightest structural metal on earth.

The MagSlide ($39.95) was developed several years ago by the father-and-son team of Tom and TJ Carter, hobbyist musicians who own a display company in Wilmington, North Carolina. One evening after work, they wanted to play some slide guitar and, on a whim, used a piece of magnesium tubing from a project they were working on. Pleased with the magnesium's warmth and sustain, they soon made the first prototypes for the MagSlide.

Even though MagSlide is light—a feathery 1.4 ounces—it has a thick lip at the top, which makes it similar in size to a thick-walled glass slide. The interior wall has a cloverleaf contour that allows your finger to rest comfortably and snuggly inside, and it fits great on my third or fourth finger. While shorter slides are best for playing single-string runs or double-stops, the MagSlide is perfect for covering all six strings.

I tried the MagSlide on a National Style O, a Martin 00-18, and an Epiphone Les Paul. The slide moves very easily up the neck and its lightness does reduce string noise. However, much of slide playing is about touch and feel. On acoustic guitar, I tend to use a heavy ceramic slide—which I find best for vibrato, as the weight helps me from moving it to fast—so it was a bit of an adjustment to play the MagSlide. On my National, my ceramic slide was a bit louder.

For electric guitar, I prefer a lighter glass slide, and the MagSlide proved a terrific alternative. It sounded much like the Coricidin bottleneck that Duane Allman famously used on songs like "Statesboro Blues" and "One Way Out," and was very easy to maneuver with a light touch.

If you're new to playing bottleneck, it's a great idea to try out an assortment of slides to see, feel, and hear what appeals to your sensibilities. The MagSlide adds another hue to the sonic palette, and it just might be the right fit for you. **playmagslide.com**





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Canadian Acoustic Group Shines on Eclectic Set

The Andrew Collins Trio spreads its wings wide on new release

BY KENNY BERKOWITZ

Andrew Collins loves to sing. So after releasing two award-winning instrumental albums—*And It Was Good* and *A Play on Words*—he decided the time was right to add some vocals to the mix. The result, *Tongue & Groove,* is a double set of 11 vocal songs (*Tongue*) and 11 instrumentals (*Groove*), and it's the best of both worlds, marking a new stage in the life of the Andrew Collins Trio.

For years, the trio—Collins (mandolin, mandocello, guitar, octave violin, violin), James McEleney (upright bass), and Mike Mezzatesta (guitar, mandolin, octave violin, violin)—have been at the center of Canada's acoustic music scene, winning Instrumental Group of the Year at the Canadian Folk Music Awards in 2011, 2014, and 2016. But *Tongue* gives the trio a different way to shine, bringing their newgrass to more conventional song structures in country ("Black Veil"), folk ("Katy Dear"), standards ("Just a Gigolo"), and honky-tonk ("I'll Be There If You Ever Want Me").

The selections here give the players a chance to stretch out within the boundaries of a four-minute song, like Roger Miller's "Leaving's Not the Only Way to Go," where Collins and Mezzatesta dance along the edge of the melody, hinting at the lightest of Mississippi blues. On Graham Nash's "King Midas in Reverse," there's little distinction between verse and improvisation, with solos by Collins and Mezzatesta that let the tune slowly unravel itself. For Nick Drake's "Cello Song," Collins balances the simple directness of his voice with the gravity of his rhythm/lead playing on mandocello and finds a combination of sounds that are as sweet as they are unlikely.

Groove is strongest when all three members are back in their element and free to take these Collins instrumentals as far as they'll go. It's here that McEleney's bass really comes alive, and instead of trying to serve the song, the trio is playing for the purest pleasure of being together, thinking up ways to combine trad bluegrass, Celtic, Dawg grass, folk, jazz, neo-classical, and pop into something new.

On mandolin and mandocello, Collins remains the focus, smartly crossing boundaries and playing with wit, imagination, and a beautifully bright, light touch. But there's more than enough room in these pieces for McEleney to keep moving the pocket and for Mezzatesta to explore the spaces between Collins's leads, quietly chording in the background ("Sunlight at Midnight"), shifting rhythms ("Badabada Ba Ba"), taking gently jazzy, understated solos ("Lullabye for Len"), building a counterpoint arpeggio ("Famous Last Words"), or flatpicking high-speed, neo-trad bluegrass runs ("Big Toaster"). Collins is the virtuoso, the famous one, of course, and it's *his* trio—but it's the combination of players fitting so perfectly alongside one another, anticipating each other's moves, that brings out the best in all of them. AG



Tommy Emmanuel & John Knowles

Heart Songs

(Thirty Tigers)

A sentimental journey with two masters

Some guys just have the touch. Acoustic guitar aces Tommy Emmanuel and John Knowles have teamed up on *Heart Songs* to put fans in a mellow mood on this collection of 14 sentimental fingerstyle instrumentals (including a dozen studio and two live recordings). Both men are gifted jazz players, but they don't stray far from the melodies on such timeless romantic country and pop ballads as Hank Williams' woeful "Cold, Cold Heart" and the Bee Gees' touching "How Deep Is Your Love." Rather, the duo allows the natural resonance of wood and steel, as well as the ringing harmonics, to complement slow tempos and the warm embrace they give to these relaxing tunes.

Indeed, less is best as Emmanuel and Knowles trade delicate lead lines and rhythm duties in sparse, unhurried arrangements that accentuate the sheer beauty of these songs. As masters of their craft, these celebrated players possess a treasure trove of technique, but they never let it get in the way of the melodies. The '50s chestnut "Walking My Baby Back Home," a relatively spry track, showcases the pairs' light touch and nimble fingers. That's also evident on the Leonard Bernstein show tune "Somewhere," from *West Side Story*, and Billy Joel's calming "Lullabye (Goodnight, My Angel)," as well as on the folk-pop ballad "He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother," which Emmanuel covered on his 2011 album *Little By Little*.

Heart Songs also showcases three originals: Emmanuel's tender "Eva Waits" and Knowles' gorgeous "After Paris" and "Turning Home."

—Greg Cahill



Mimi Fox

This Bird Still Flies

(Origin Records)

A quietly adventurous acoustic outing

On her first full album of acoustic tunes, seasoned jazz guitarist Mimi Fox largely foregoes flash for stunning lyrical solos that often exude a sense of quietude. That said, this San Francisco Bay Area guitarist deftly navigates a series of stylistic shifts and twisting rhythms on the opening number, "Get Away Blues," one of five originals on the 11-track album. The depth of her technical bag of tricks is also on display on the cover of the Beatles' "Day Tripper," which incrementally bends that song's distinctive riff before venturing far outside the melody. But it is on the Fab Four classic "Blackbird"—the only track played on baritone—that Fox's penchant for expressive calmness really soars.

Despite her affinity for pop, Fox also delves deeply into the jazz songbook, focusing not on well-known guitar works, but on those of celebrated horn players. Case in point: her striking rendition of trumpeter Kenny Dorham's "Blue Bossa." Elsewhere, her interpretation of the jazz standard "You Don't Know What Loves Is," a favorite of both John Coltrane and Chet Baker, clocks in at 8:34 and is an adventurous exploration marked by multiple shifts in tempo, rhythm, and harmony. Guitarist Andy Timmons joins Fox for a duet on the title track.

Fox's penchant for lyricism and her abilities as an arranger inform the album's closing track, "America the Beautiful" (see transcription on page 44), a gentle, quiet reading that truly captures the eloquence of that popular anthem.

—GC



Jesse Terry, Lizanne Knott, and Michael Logen

Sunset Avenue Sessions

(Transoceanic Records)

Charming set of country-flavored covers and originals

They're hardly a supergroup of the Crosby, Stills & Nash variety, but this trio, made up of three clearly capable country-oriented singer-songwriters, creates a sound that aspires to the same standard in similarly soft and serene settings. It's telling that two gentle Tom Petty covers—"Learning to Fly" and "Wildflowers"—bookend the effort; the hushed treatments they're accorded set the tone for the album overall. Gilded harmonies are shared in various groupings, underscored by the steady strum and effervescent shimmer of multiple acoustic guitars. In some ways they've set themselves a high bar by showcasing the Petty covers so prominently. On the other hand, their takes on the Buffalo Springfield anthem "For What It's Worth" and the Johnny Cash standard "Ring of Fire" are comparatively dark and subdued; very different takes on classics, for sure.

Terry's own "Stargazer" (with Dar Williams on backing vocals) provides one of the more enticing examples of what this talented trio has to offer as songwriters, but both Knott and Logan have leading moments, as well. The guitars provide a supple foundation throughout, but it's the ringing refrains, aided by the nimble fretwork of accompanist Tom Hampton on mandolin, dobro, lap steel, and lead, that give life to these mellow musings.

Ultimately, it's easy to be charmed, if not completely transfixed, by this album.

—Lee Zimmerman



Marley's Ghost

Travelin' Shoes

(Sage Arts)

Give praise to a hallelujah revival

Switching their template from the arcane Americana of the Band, the Byrds, and others of that ilk, *Travelin' Shoes* finds Marley's Ghost summoning a sound akin to a gospel revival through precise picking, acapella embellishments, and soothing songs of praise. All but three of the tracks are traditional in origin, but all are given distinctive treatment, resonating with clear purpose and passion.

The sextet of skilled multi-instrumentalists/singers—Dan Wheetman, Jon Wilcox, Mike Phelan, Ed Littlefield Jr., Jerry Fletcher, and Bob Nichols—have always shown their strength in their assured acoustic trappings. Each contributes to the adroit arrangements, sometimes driven by supple guitar, but also incorporating the additional additives of fiddle, mandolin, dobro, and pedal steel. The sound they create emanates a supple sheen, but the emphatic, down-home approach to religion and revelry still shine through.

Likewise, with producer Larry Campbell (Bob Dylan, Levon Helm) overseeing the proceedings, the cohesive arrangements are meticulously maintained. Although the approach varies from the didactic delivery of the title track and the reggae rhythms of "Run Come See Jerusalem" to the assured shuffle of "Someday" and "Shadrack," the songs retain an equal blend of fervor and finesse. The intertwined solos that weave through "Standing By the Bedside of a Stranger," the pluck and sway that embellishes "You Can't Stand Up Alone," and the deft fingerpicking highlighted on "A Beautiful Life" all attest to the band's ability to underscore their performances with reverence and respect. *—LZ*



Joe Robinson

Undertones

(Joe's Garage)

Virtuoso's latest is dense with brilliant moments

Joe Robinson is among the hottest young exponents of the Merle Travis/Chet Atkins approach to guitar. This is abundantly apparent on "Let the Guitar Do the Talkin'" (see transcription on page 92), a standout track from the Australian guitarist's latest album, *Undertones*, which, with its breakneck-speed fingerpicking, speaks to an effortless mastery of the idiom.

Robinson, 28 and now based in Nashville, has long been celebrated as a virtuoso guitarist, as well as a singer-songwriter. He was an obvious prodigy when he picked up the guitar at 10; by the age of 11, he was touring with Tommy Emmanuel.

The original songs on *Undertones* are pleasant enough, but Robinson's guitar playing is what really does the talking, to borrow his phrase. The album is dense with brilliant moments on both the acoustic and the electric. On "Anything But Love You," Robinson layers straight acoustic and effects-laden electric guitars to orchestral effect. "(Do You Want It) To Be Me" finds Robinson rendering a smart modern acoustic accompaniment, with soulful soloing first on electric, then on acoustic. "Snake Man" has a glorious flatpicked acoustic solo in a blues-jazz mode.

Though *Undertones* touches on influences from traditional fingerstyle to jazz-rock, it does not lack focus; rather it is a celebration of the guitar's many forms of expression. It's clear that Robinson has spent a great deal of energy studying how these styles are connected on the instrument, and more important, he has synthesized everything in a highly personal way.

—Adam Perlmutter



Hayes Carll

What It Is

(Dualtone)

Powerful songs walk a tightrope between comedy and tragedy

There are so many good lines on What It Is, Texas singer-songwriter Hayes Carll's sixth album, I don't know where to begin. How about: "In times like these, everyone could use a hand / instead of standing round, losing ground, fighting for the promised land." That's a rocker, a song Carll says "is about the world around me." Or maybe: "What it was is gone forever/what it could be God only knows/ What it is, is right in front of me / and I'm not letting go." That's from the country two-step title track, catching Carll at this moment in time, engaged to singer/songwriter Allison Moorer and thinking of all the ways they could mess it up.

Put those two halves together—and throw in the painted-velvet, shaggy dog story "Jesus and Elvis"—and you've got Carll at his sharp-witted best, tip-toeing a tightrope between comedy and tragedy, learning to accept the absurdity of everyday life. But more than that, more than Carll's dust-dry Texas delivery, this album knows how to rock when it needs to rock, dance when it needs to dance, and lean in close when Carll needs to promise—as on the touching closing track—"I will stay." It knows when the mood could use a little brass ("Things You Don't Want to Know"), when it calls for strings ("American Dream"), and when all it needs is a solid fingerpicked acoustic guitar (which appears on various songs). It also knows how difficult it is to walk the line between cracking wise and being wise, and it knows how good these songs really are.

– KB



John Smith

Hummingbird

Commoner Records/Thirty Tigers

History springs from guitarist's picking and singing

With *Hummingbird*, John Smith comes home to the progressive folk guitar that inspired him. Drawing primarily from the British canon, Smith collects English folk, traditional tunes dating back to the 15th century, and three originals that could pass for vintage music from the scepter'd isle.

Using a battery of guitars, including a Martin D-28, a Gibson LG-2, a pair of Fylde Falstaffs, and a Fylde Alexander, Smith dons several guises for these often rambunctious story-songs: everyman, poet, and soldier girding for battle.

His grainy tenor bubbles like a clear stream over a gravel bed, while ringing accents pick a thorny path between percussive swipes on "The Lowlands of Holland." "Boudica," an original paean to the Iceni (early Brittonic) warrior queen who defied Rome, swoops like a cavalry charge on rattling picking and flanged strums. The ill-fated voyage of discovery recounted on "Lord Franklin" is borne on rebounding currents of double-tracked guitar, wiry one minute and brittle the next. A free-falling coil of *rasgueado*-style strumming unfurls another original, "Axe Mountain (Revisited)," a blood-spattered murder ballad that feels grounded in a landscape of windswept moors and gleeful in its depiction of carnage.

By embracing the blood, death, and thunder of traditional folk, *Hummingbird* evokes the very Englishness that imbued acts like Pentangle and others. It's a rolling musical landscape punctuated with rising cross-picked crags and peaks of detuned dissonance. It's a familiar yet challenging weave of the supple and the jarring. —*Pat Moran*







JOE ROBINSON PLAYS "LET THE GUITAR DO THE TALKIN'" IN AG'S RICHMOND, CALIFORNIA, STUDIO
acousticguitar.com/tag/july-august-2019

Joe Robinson



ETHAN_JAMES PHOTOGRAPHY

Let the Guitar Do the Talkin'

Learn Joe Robinson's modern Travis picking tour de force

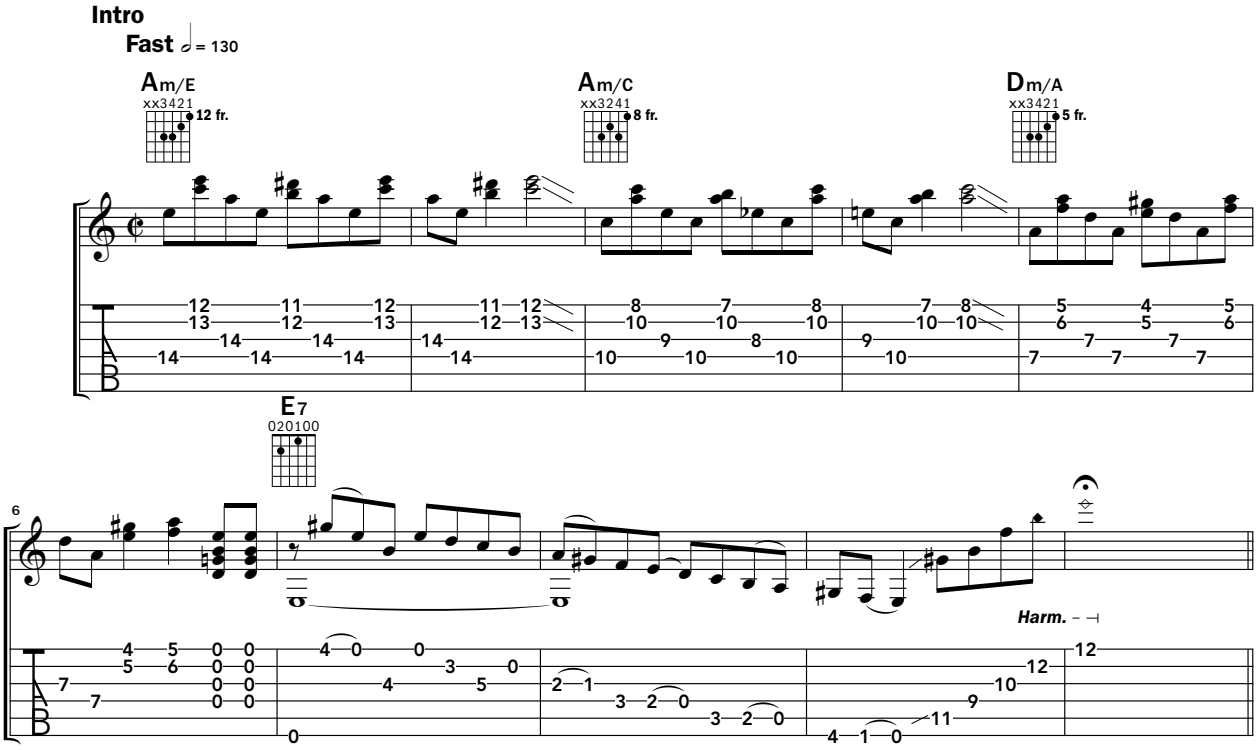
BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

It's one thing to play blazingly fast Travis picking, and quite another to sing at the same time, as Joe Robinson does on "Let the Guitar Do the Talkin'," a song in which the narrator apparently captivates a concertgoer through his six-string work. (See album review on page 90.) Though this transcription is based on the album version, it's very similar to what Robinson played when he stopped by *AG*'s offices in April of last year to film a video for our *Sessions* series, which you can find at acousticguitar.com/sessions.

Robinson plays "Let the Guitar Do the Talkin'" with a thumbpick and fingers. While you could play the song with straight fingerpicking, using the guitarist's preferred approach will allow you to more easily handle the speedier flourishes, like the single-note runs in bars 7–10 and 92–95, while lending a certain *oomph* to the bass notes.

The bulk of the song is based on Travis picking, the technique named after the country guitarist Merle Travis and adapted by players such as Chet Atkins and Tommy Emmanuel, among many others. (For more on Travis picking, see Jamie Stillway's Basics lesson in the December 2017 issue of *AG* and her Weekly Workout in the January 2019 issue.) The basic picking pattern that serves the whole song is notated in bars 11–18. In a nutshell, here's what to do: While holding down each chord shape as long as possible, pick the down-stemmed notes with your thumbpick and the up-stemmed notes with your index, middle, and, if you'd like, ring fingers.

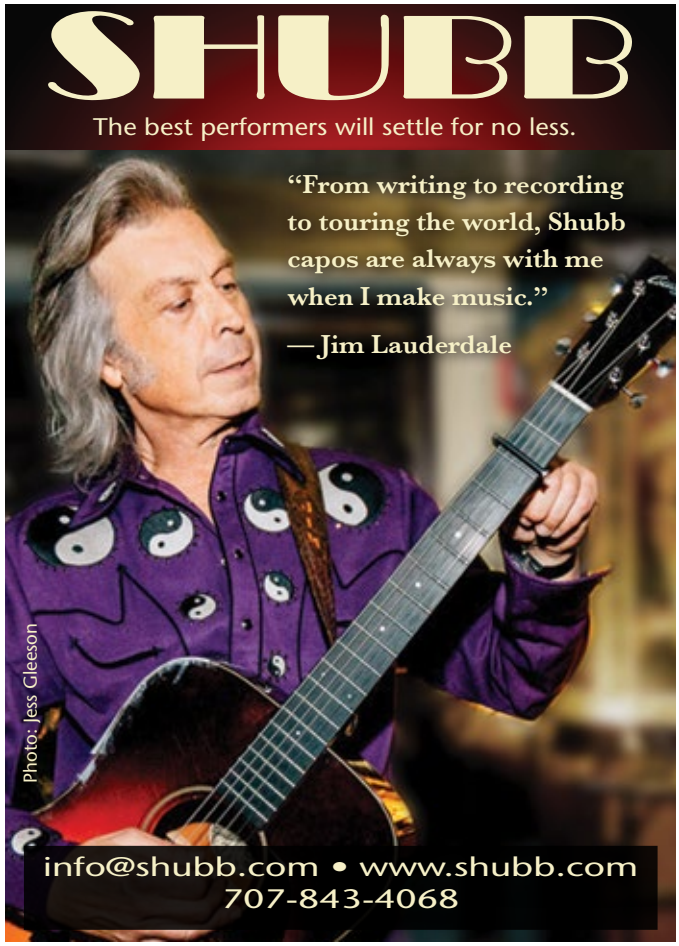
As in any Travis picking situation, it would be a good idea to palm mute the bass notes. This will give them added definition, as well as provide textural contrast to the notes on the higher strings. In other words, in this context, palm muting is an excellent technique that can lend the impression of multiple instruments being played at once. AG
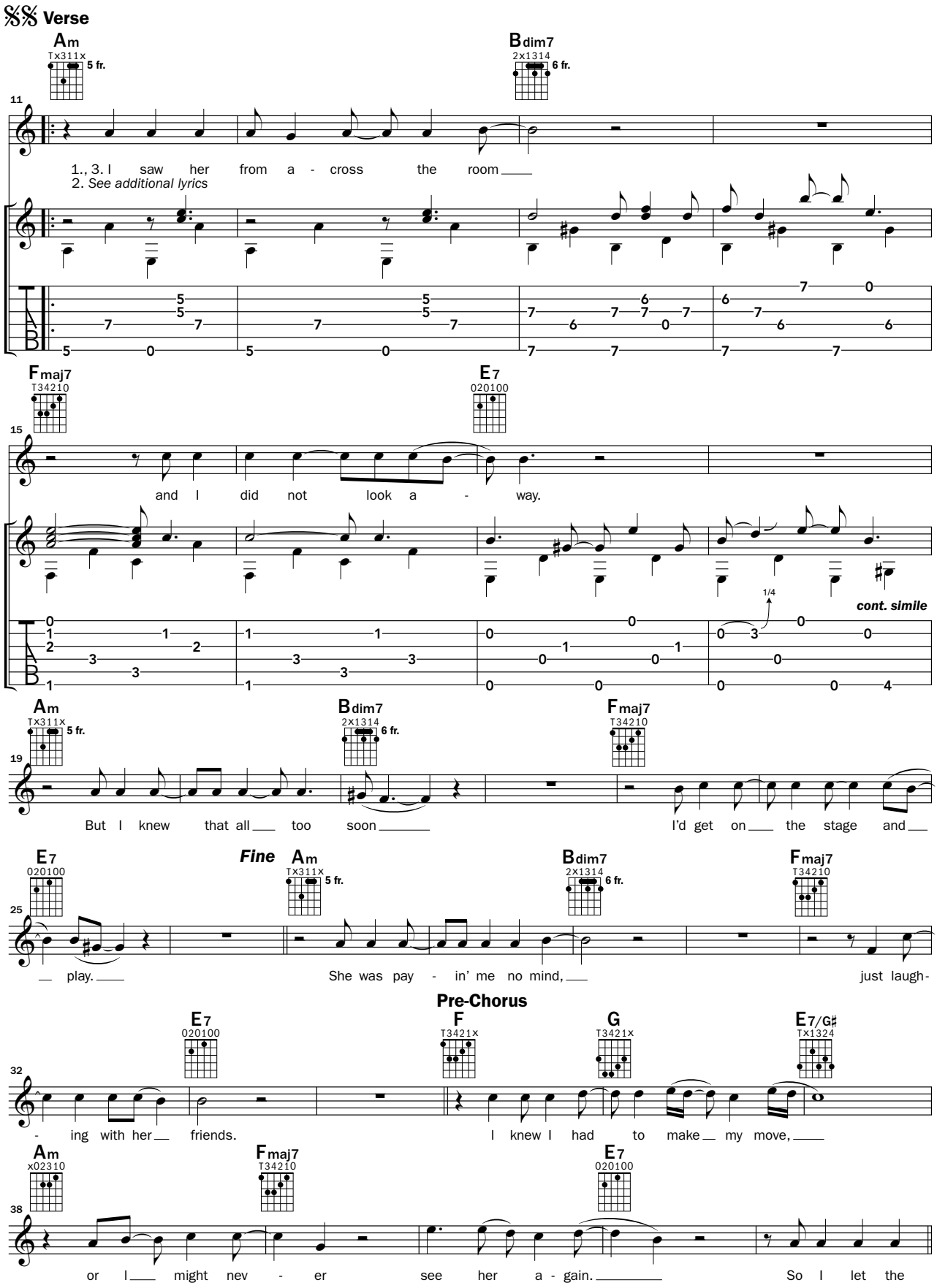


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Cont. on p. 94





Cont. from p. 93



𝄋 Chorus

Dm x13421 5 fr. | Am Tx311x 5 fr. | E7/G♯ Tx1324 | Am x02310 | Fmaj7 T34210

43
gui - tar do___ the talk - in', 'cause it___ knew just what to_____

2., 3. *See additional lyrics*

1st and 2nd times, with Fill 1

E7 020100 | Dm x13421 5 fr. | Am Tx311x 5 fr. | E7/G♯ Tx1324 | Am x02310

49
___ say. With a smooth mel - o - dy_____ and the bass a walk - ing.

Fmaj7 T34210 | E7 020100 | Dm x13421 5 fr. | Am Tx311x 5 fr.

55
She start - ed walk - ing my_____ way. I drew her close to___ me with the har -

E7/G♯ Tx1324 | Am x02310 | Fmaj7 T34210 | E7 020100

61
- mo - ny_____ and she be - gan_____ to_____ dance. I let the

Dm x13421 5 fr. | C x13040 | G/B x10034 | C/E 0x2010 | F T3421x

To Coda 1

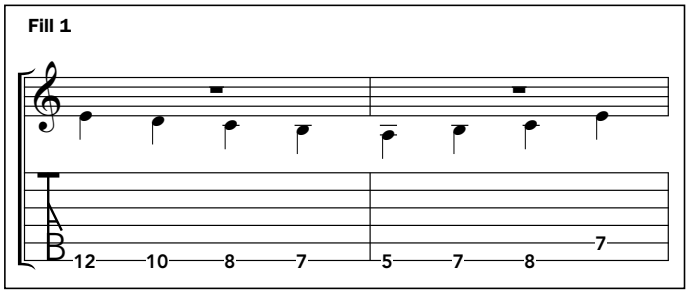
67
gui - tar do___ the talk - in', I_____ knew it was___ my

1.

E 023100 | Am x02310 | E7 0x3140 7 fr.
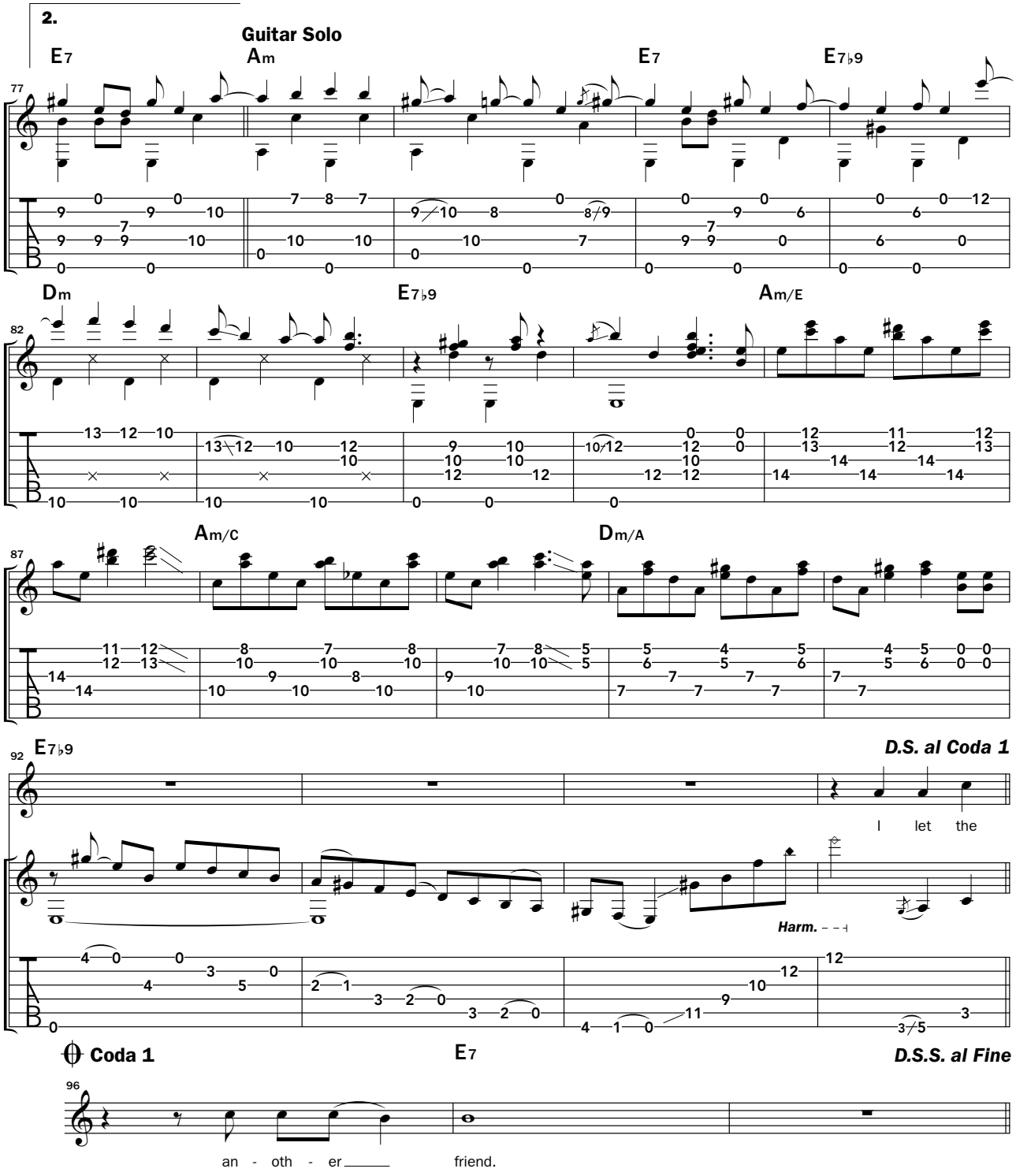
72
on - ly chance._____

Fill 1



Cont. on p. 96

Cont. from p. 95



2. And she was standing by the bandstand
When I played my last song
And she said, "If you could show me how
I'd love to play along"
"There's a beautiful Martin at my place," she said
"Vintage 1952

Pre-Chorus
"I got a feeling we could make some music
If you could help me to get it in tune"

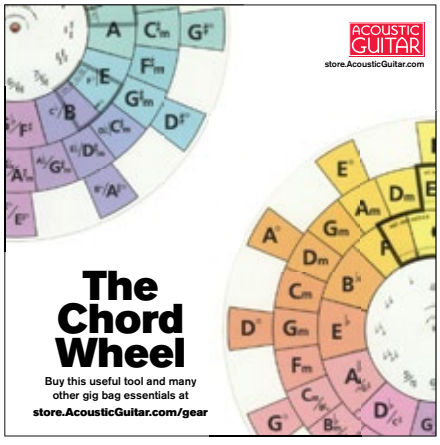
Chorus 2
So I let the guitar do the talking
'Cause it knew just what to say
With a smooth melody and the bass walking
Things started going my way
I drew her close to me with the harmony
And our hands fell right into place
I let the guitar do the talking
She loved everything that it had to say

Chorus 3
I let the guitar do the talking
And it said a sweet goodbye
I wish that I could stay and play
But I'm leaving town tonight
Another show on down the road
And it all begins again
I let the guitar do the talking
Another town, another friend









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1948 Levin De Luxe

Europe's only contender for archtop dominance came from this Swedish maker

BY TONY MARCUS

Sweden is not the first place you'd think of as a source for fine archtop guitars. But in the 1940s and '50s, some of the best examples in Europe were produced in the Levin factory. Levin instruments have been played by many of the finest European guitarists, from Pete Townshend (early in his career) to Anders Färdal, as well as an American musician of note, Fred Guy, who was with the Duke Ellington Orchestra for many years. (There's a famous photo of Django Reinhardt playing Guy's non-cutaway Levin De Luxe during a 1947 US tour.)

The Levin company was founded in 1900 by Herman Carlson Levin (né Herman Carlson), a cabinet maker by trade, who learned to make guitars in New York City in the late 1880s before moving back to Sweden to set up shop. Starting as a modest two-man operation, Levin rapidly expanded. By 1948, the company had turned out 200,000 instruments, the bulk of them flattop guitars. (To put that number in perspective, C. F. Martin & Company made 108,269 guitars between its founding, in 1833, and 1948.)

The 1948 Model 1 De Luxe archtop shown here sat at the very top of the Levin line. With a lower bout of over 18 inches, this formidable instrument is as big as the Gibson Super 400 and the Epiphone Emperor, the largest factory-made guitars in the United States. The De Luxe's build quality and ornamentation are also on a par with top-of-the-line Gibson and Epiphone archtops, though its inlays are pearloid celluloid, rather than mother-of-pearl. As with some prewar Epiphones, the sides and back of this example are walnut, rather than the customary maple.

This De Luxe is in fine condition and is 100 percent original, save for a missing pickguard and a single replacement peghead inlay. The profile of its mahogany neck (with a non-adjustable duraluminum truss rod) is quite comfortable—something that cannot be said for many European guitars. In terms of sound, the guitar rivals some of its best American-made counterparts. It's loud and with cutting power for big band use, but capable of considerable subtlety as well. AG



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